

The Mission work of the Aranui Sisters of Mercy in Eastern Christchurch

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*A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in History, University of Canterbury*

Supervised by
Katie Pickles and Lyndon Fraser

2020

Abstract

This thesis examines the mission work of the Aranui Sisters of Mercy in the Eastern Suburbs of Christchurch, New Zealand, placing the story of the Aranui Sisters within the broader historiographical context of women's history, local history and the wider historiography of the Catholic Church. Central to this thesis are the voices of the sisters themselves. Major primary sources are oral history interviews, and written material left by the sisters in archives and published texts. The work of Sisters Helen Goggin, Teresa O'Connor and Pauline O'Regan, who left the convent in 1973 to live and work amongst the community in the suburb of Aranui, has not been explored in any depth outside of Sister Pauline's own memoir. This study focuses on the sisters' work building a sense of community and breaking down the barriers of loneliness and isolation that the sisters believed existed in the suburbs. This thesis will argue that the work of the Aranui Sisters of Mercy was an example of successful community engagement that benefitted the lives of many people living in the communities they worked in. My research demonstrates that when communities are engaged and brought together social issues such as loneliness begin to fade.

As their work grew to include the North East Parish of Burwood and the surrounding suburb of Parklands, the original three sisters were later joined by Sisters Marie McCrea, Monica Stack and Colleen McBride. Part of their mission involved establishing the North East Development Scheme, which allowed further expansion and drew members of the community into their mission.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the help of a number of people who have helped and guided me along the way. Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisors Katie Pickles and Lyndon Fraser for their expert advice and help throughout the writing of this thesis. Thank you also to the University of Canterbury for funding my studies through the UC Master's Scholarship. I would also like to acknowledge the archivists who have helped me throughout my research and kindly answered my many requests for photographs and information. A special thanks goes to my fellow postgraduates for their friendship and support throughout my postgraduate experience. I would, of course, like to thank my Mum, Dad and my siblings, Simon and Megan, for all their love and support throughout my studies. To Mitchell, thank you for helping with the more tedious aspects of my research and supporting me throughout this process. I would particularly like to thank my interviewees, Sister Marie, Sister Helen, Father Kevin and Beverly McNabb for giving up their time in allowing me to interview them. Their thoughts and reflections on their involvement in the mission and North East Community Development Scheme has been invaluable.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the work of the Sisters without whom this thesis would not be possible. This thesis is dedicated to them and in the memory of Sister Monica, Sister Colleen, Sister Teresa, and Sister Pauline.

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“It was an average day at No 18 Portchester Street
 When these three ladies arrived
 They are Sisters of Mercy, we exclaimed
 We do hope they can survive.

And they did all they could
 All the places they would go.
 Our Faith in our Community
 We knew would grow and grow.

Sister Pauline, Sister Teresa and Sister Helen too
 Made 18 Portchester Street a caring avenue.
 Their loving care for everyone
 Sometimes laughter, sometimes sad
 Happiness at special times
 Made everybody glad.

Their garden and their home they made
 everything so cool
 Hi Sister Pauline, we would call,
 We will drop you off at school

The years have come and gone
 And all of us agree
 The year started great for all
 In 1973.”¹

¹ “25 Years 1973-1998: Love, Hope and Charity.” Written by a member of the community for the Sisters celebration of twenty-five years working in the East. From: Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Correspondence - Miscellaneous, Including Funding*. 2018.15.11.

Introduction

We always wore civilian clothes which was quite new for Sisters then. We dressed up on Sunday to go to mass or any other time that we attended Church services, so amongst the people we were always in civilian clothes. One day quite early on in our time there we had a group of Sisters come to visit, two or three of them all dressed in habits of course and we were chatting away inside the house and there was a knock on the front door. So the Sister who was nearest to the door who happened to be one of the sisters dressed in a habit went out to the door and whoever was standing there – I can't just remember who it was – they were greeted warmly by the Sister asking 'What can I do for you?' and the woman said I want to see one of the sisters. So she was talking to one of the sisters but she didn't know it!²

In 1973, three Sisters of Mercy moved away from the isolation of their convent and into the eastern suburbs of Christchurch, where they opened the Catholic Church to the local community through their mission work. These women worked to establish relationships with their neighbours and, by so doing, provided a support network for the most vulnerable residents in their time of need. Sister Helen's words quoted above give a real sense of the impact the mission had on the community. Local people came to associate the sisters' home as a place they could call on to talk out an issue or simply go to for a cup of tea and a chat. The fact that the neighbour did not recognise the sister dressed in a habit as being a Sister of Mercy shows that the Aranui Sisters were making the Church more accessible. It also demonstrates how their mission work crossed religious boundaries, as they hoped to provide support and care for anyone in need regardless of their religious beliefs.

This thesis explores the mission work of the Aranui Sisters of Mercy in the eastern suburbs of Christchurch, particularly in the suburbs of Burwood, Parklands and Aranui. Sister Pauline O'Regan, Sister Teresa O'Connor and Sister Helen Goggin moved into these places in the 1970s. They left their cloistered lives in the convent to work amongst the community, later to be joined by fellow Sisters Marie McCrea, Monica Stack and Colleen McBride. Through their work, the sisters helped to empower women and spread the Gospel in the community. This research aims to uncover their stories and uses interviews with the surviving Sisters who currently reside in a local retirement village.

² Sister Helen Goggin, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

These oral histories are supplemented with a diverse range of sources including local church archives and newspapers.

In its wider conceptualisation, this thesis responds affirmatively to the call made in the mid-1990s by the pioneering Irish women's historian and Dominican nun Margaret MacCurtain, who argued that the story of nuns in Ireland to be recovered as part of a broader women's history:

the nuns' story is integral to the history of women in 20th century Ireland ... as a category nuns provide a map to guide the ignorant through the unexamined landscape of where and how women occupied the religious, cultural and economic space assigned to them in 20th century Ireland ... There is a puzzling complexity about the place they occupy ... powerful as negotiating tools in the State's educational and welfare plans, south and north, they became in reality pawns in the struggle for control between church and State, between bishops and departments of government. Why that came about is largely unexplored ... we need to hear the voices of women religious

Although MacCurtain's challenge speaks primarily to an Irish context, it has far wider resonance in the Catholic world. Indeed, the Sisters of Mercy have Irish roots, which can be traced back to their founder Catherine McAuley, and most of the women at the centre of this study had ancestral ties to Ireland. In remaining true to MacCurtain's call, this thesis takes a women's history approach. It aims to uncover the largely hidden contributions of the Sisters of Mercy to local Christchurch communities in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. In doing so, it explores themes such as religion and spirituality as well as the public and private spheres. This research relates these themes to the lives of the Aranui Sisters and their calling to leave the sheltered life of the convent for the challenges of life in the eastern suburbs. It also examines these themes in relation to the women and communities they worked alongside.

Historiography

There is a wide-ranging literature of religious history in New Zealand, including a broad historiography of Catholic religious history. These texts include a number of works outlining the history of the Catholic Church in New Zealand from the arrival of the first missionaries through to the establishment of dioceses and parishes throughout New Zealand. Works on the broader history of the Catholic Church include Michael King's

God's Farthest Outpost and E.R. Simmons' *A Brief History of the Catholic Church in New Zealand*.³ Christopher van der Krogt's thesis "More A Part than Apart the Catholic Community in New Zealand Society, 1918-1940," tells of the experience of the Catholic Community in New Zealand society and how they maintained their Catholic identity. While this text focuses on an earlier period of 1918 to 1940, it helps to position the story of the Aranui Sisters in the wider history of Catholicism in New Zealand.⁴ Patrick O'Farrell's extensive body of work on the history of the Irish in Australia and New Zealand provides an extensive overview of Catholicism in Australasia with particular reference to Irish immigrants.⁵ O'Farrell's work is important to this study as not only did the Order of the Sisters of Mercy have Irish roots but also many of the men and women they worked alongside were of Irish descent. Works by Lyndon Fraser and Neil Vaney give histories of the experiences of Irish Catholics in New Zealand, specifically the West Coast which formed part of the Christchurch Diocese.⁶ Vaney's work focuses on the encounter between French and Irish clergy on the West Coast and also shows how the Sisters of Mercy's contributed to the Catholic community on the West Coast by teaching in local Catholic schools, visiting hospitals and the elderly, as well as, broader forms of community service.⁷ *'A Fair and Just Solution'? A History of the Integration of Private Schools in New Zealand* by Rory Sweetman provides a history of the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act 1975. This text provides valuable context as the introduction of this Act helped to aid the mission work of the Aranui Sisters as it freed religious women to become involved in missions outside of education. Sweetman's text looks at the historical background to the Act, how the Act emerged and responses to the Act from both secular and religious groups. This text also provides valuable content to the wider

³ See: Michael King, *God's Farthest Outpost: A History of Catholics in New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1997); E. R. Simmons, *A Brief History of the Catholic Church in New Zealand* (Auckland: Catholic Publications Centre, 1978).

⁴ Christopher John van der Krogt "More A Part than Apart, the Catholic Community in New Zealand Society, 1918-1940," (PhD, Massey University, 1994).

⁵ See: Patrick O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church in Australia: A Short History 1788-1967* (Melbourne: Thomas Nelson Ltd., 1968); Patrick O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia* (Australia: New South Wales University Press, 1986); Patrick O'Farrell, *Vanished Kingdoms: Irish in Australia and New Zealand* (Australia: New South Wales University Press, 1990); Patrick O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community: An Australian History* (Australia: New South Wales University Press, 1992).

⁶ See: Lyndon Fraser, *Castles of Gold: A History of New Zealand's West Coast Irish* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2007); Neil Vaney, "The Dual Tradition: Irish Catholics and French Priests in New Zealand: The West Coast Experience, 1865-1910." (MA, University of Canterbury, 1976).

⁷ Vaney, "The Dual Tradition," 103-104.

history of the Catholic Church in New Zealand as the Act enable the Church to maintain its schools throughout the country.⁸

Locally Michael O'Meeghan's *Held Firm by Faith: A History of the Catholic Diocese of Christchurch 1840-1987* is a key text for framing the work of the sisters in the broader context of the history of the Christchurch Diocese. His work explores the formation and history of the diocese with mention to the various religious orders working within the diocese, helping to place the work of the Aranui Sisters of Mercy within their local context.⁹ In addition, Barry Allom's thesis "Bishop Grimes: His Context and Contribution to the Catholic Church in Canterbury" explores the life of the region's first bishop and is another locally based text that looks at the early beginnings of the Christchurch Diocese in colonial Canterbury.¹⁰ These texts are important for placing the work of the sisters within the history of local Catholicism.

Alongside these broad histories of the Catholic Church is a number of works on the Second Vatican Council its history and effects. *The Second Vatican Council: Message and Meaning* by Gerald O'Collins and Otto Hermann Pesch's work *Second Vatican Council: Prehistory, Event, Results, Posthistory* demonstrate the effects of the Council on the Church internationally.¹¹ Andrew Greeley in *The Catholic Revolution: New Wine, Old Wineskins, and the Second Vatican Council*, also explores the changes and effects of the Second Vatican Council and argues that it was a much-needed attempt at reform.¹² Sources such as those by Flaherty, McGrath, as well as, Higgs and Evans demonstrate the effects of the Second Vatican Council on the mission work of the Sisters of Mercy on

⁸ Rory Sweetman, "A Fair and Just Solution?" *A History of the Integration of Private Schools in New Zealand* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2002), 18-22.

⁹ Michael O'Meeghan SM, *Held Firm by Faith: A History of the Catholic Diocese of Christchurch 1840-1987* (Christchurch: Catholic Diocese of Christchurch, 1988).

¹⁰ Barry Allom, "Bishop Grimes: His Context and Contribution to the Catholic Church in Canterbury," (MA, University of Canterbury, 1968). See, also, Lyndon Fraser, *To Tara via Holyhead: Irish Catholic Immigrants in Nineteenth-Century Christchurch*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1997).

¹¹ See: Gerald O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council: Message and Meaning* (Liturgical Press, 2014); Otto Hermann Pesch, *Second Vatican Council: Prehistory, Event, Results, Posthistory*, trans. Deirdre Dempsey. (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2014).

¹² Andrew M. Greeley, *The Catholic Revolution: New Wine, Old Wineskins, and the Second Vatican Council* (California: University of California Press, 2004).

an international scale.¹³ Michael O'Meehan also addresses the Second Vatican Council on a local scale highlighting how the Council effected the Christchurch Diocese. Together these texts highlight the larger changes in the Church, which allowed the Aranui Sisters to move out of the convent and carry out their work in the East. It is also important that the testimony of the Aranui Sisters, as will be seen throughout this study, suggests that the effects of the Second Vatican Council were more far-reaching than historians have believed.

As this thesis works to recover the story of the Aranui Sisters, the histories of the Sisters of Mercy both locally and throughout New Zealand is integral to this study. Some work has been done on the history of the Sisters of Mercy in Christchurch by Sister Declan Burke in a centennial history spanning the years 1878 to 1978. This research text provides valuable context to this study as it contributes useful information regarding the institution in which these sisters worked. *Mercy Through the Years* outlines the history of the congregation these women dedicated their lives to, in which Burke gives an account of the work the Sisters of Mercy conducted in the Christchurch Diocese. Burke begins by outlining their establishment in Hokitika in the 1870s and traces their work and expansion throughout the diocese with particular attention given to their role in the education of girls through Villa Maria and St Mary's schools. Burke also refers to the work of Sisters Pauline, Helen and Teresa in Aranui. She briefly describes how the women became involved in the community, providing opportunities for mothers to come together for prayer and scripture discussions, teaching at the local school and in working with local organisations already established in the community.¹⁴ Another key text is Séan Brosnahan's work *Mercy Women: The Villa Maria Story*. This book traces the history of Villa Maria College, one of the Sisters of Mercy's schools in Christchurch, beginning with a brief history of the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland and their arrival on New Zealand's West Coast. This work provides a valuable background to the work of the Sisters of Mercy in

¹³ Teresa A. Flaherty, "Australian Sisters of Mercy as Missionaries in Papua New Guinea: Following Paths of Mercy beside Peoples of Ancient Melanesian Cultures," *The Australasian Catholic Record* 87 (2010): 47–60; Madeline Sophie McGrath, *These Women? Women Religious in the History of Australia - The Sisters of Mercy Parramatta 1888-198* (Australia: News South Wales University Press, 1989); Catherine Higgs, and Jean N. Evans, "Embracing Activism in Apartheid South Africa: The Sisters of Mercy in Bophuthatswana, 1974–94," *The Catholic Historical Review* 94 (2008): 500–521.

¹⁴ Sister Declan Burke, *Mercy through the Years: The Centennial History of the Sisters of Mercy Christchurch Diocese, 1878-1978* (Christchurch: Sisters of Mercy Trust Board, 1978), 81.

Christchurch and gives mention to the work of Pauline, Teresa and Helen in Aranui.¹⁵ Other studies also speak to the sisters' work. In Tim Baker's, *Aranui and Wainoni History: Christchurch, New Zealand* briefly mentions the sisters' life living on Hampshire Street working to get to know people in the community, while Katie Pickles' *Christchurch Ruptures* argues that post-earthquake developers would be wise to listen to the words of Sister Pauline to prevent a repeat of the social wasteland that was created by the original Parklands development.¹⁶ Two studies have been conducted on the sisters' work in the Parklands community by Lorraine Petelo, which analyses female participation in leadership training and the sisters' unique "frentor" model of supervision in community leadership training.¹⁷ However, Petelo's studies take a sociological approach, focusing on their model of community development and there has been no comprehensive study of the work of the sisters tracing their story from the convent to the end of their mission in 2005.

While Burke and Brosnahan provide short overviews of the work of the Aranui Sisters, their mission work in the Eastern Suburbs of Christchurch has largely been ignored in secondary literature. Petelo's research remains the only study to focus solely on their work. *A Changing Order* by Pauline O'Regan is, therefore, a key piece of writing that aids in contextualising this study. This autobiographical text discusses her childhood and the years leading up to her ordination, as well as her life as a Sister of Mercy up until the publication of the text in 1986. *A Changing Order* explores the years spent in Aranui working within the community. It describes the struggles of the early years and the establishment of their relationships with members of the community, particularly local women.

The work of the Sisters of Mercy nationally has been documented in a range of sources. These sources tend to follow the work of Burke in the form of celebratory works commemorating the centenary of the Sisters of Mercy in various parts of New Zealand,

¹⁵ Seán Brosnahan, *Mercy Women: The Villa Maria Story* (Christchurch: Caxton, 2018).

¹⁶ Tim Baker, *Aranui and Wainoni History: Christchurch, New Zealand* (Christchurch, 2007), 239; Katie Pickles, *Christchurch Ruptures* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2016), 157-158.

¹⁷ Lorraine Petelo, "Seeing Things Differently: A Study of Women Participating in Leadership Training Within a Community Development," *New Zealand Journal of Adult Learning* 24 (1996): 39-72; Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, "Women Frentors: Supervision in a Leadership Training Programme with a Community Development Programme" by Lorraine Petelo, 2018.15.25.

including Auckland, Takapuna, Blenheim, Greymouth and Dunedin.¹⁸ These centennial works, along with Marcienne D. Kirk's *Remembering your Mercy: Mother Mary Cecilia Maher and the First Sisters of Mercy in New Zealand 1850-1880*, trace the history of the Sisters of Mercy in New Zealand, outlining the various types of work they undertook in communities around New Zealand. They reveal that the role of the Sisters of Mercy throughout New Zealand tended to follow similar patterns. Initially, at least, the sisters filled a need for teachers, establishing schools throughout the country and establishing hospitals and medical centres where needed.

This national work on the Sisters of Mercy also fits into the wider historiography of religious women in New Zealand. A range of works have been written on the histories of various female religious orders throughout New Zealand. These works are similar to Burke's *Mercy Through the Years* in that they trace the history of various orders throughout New Zealand. These works include *Windows on a Women's World: The Dominican Sisters of Aotearoa New Zealand* by Susannah Grant, *Mackillop Women: The Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart Aotearoa New Zealand 1883-2006* by Diane Strevens and Jessie Munro's, *The Story of Suzanne Aubert*.¹⁹ These works highlight the trends seen in female religious orders regarding the types of mission work these women chose to undertake and the ways in which they evolved and adapted to find their place in the modern world following the Second Vatican Council. Many of these religious orders followed similar trends moving from their work as educators of young Catholics in Catholic schools throughout New Zealand into more community-based work in the wake of these momentous changes. They also help to place the work of the Sisters of Mercy within the context of Catholic missionary work and helps to highlight the reasons why the Aranui Sisters sought to move away from more traditional forms of missionary work to focus on communities. Another key text is Katie Pickles' article "Colonial Sainthood in

¹⁸ See: *Gracious is the Time: Centenary of the Sisters of Mercy, Auckland, New Zealand 1850-1950* (Auckland, 1952); St. Joseph's Parish, *The Mercy Sisters and St. Josephs Takapuna, 1893-1993* (Takapuna: St. Joseph's Parish, 1993); James Geoffrey Furness, *Sisters of Mercy, Blenheim: 100 Years of Service* (Blenheim: St Joseph's Convent, 1985); Mercy Centennial Planning Committee, *Reflect, Rejoice: Sisters of Mercy Celebrate One Hundred Years in Greymouth* (Greymouth: Mercy Centennial Planning Committee, 1982); St. Philomena's College, *St. Philomena's College: Conducted by the Sisters of Mercy* (Dunedin. Dunedin: The College, 1997).

¹⁹ See: Susannah Grant, *Windows on a Women's World: The Dominican Sisters of Aotearoa New Zealand* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2017); Diane Strevens, *Mackillop Women: The Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart Aotearoa New Zealand 1883-2006* (Auckland: David Ling Publishing, 2008); Jessie Munro, *The Story of Suzanne Aubert* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1996).

Australasia” which outlines the growing literature of women’s religious history and the relationship between religious and secular histories, through her comparison of Mary MacKillop and Suzanne Aubert and how their representations shape national identities.²⁰ Together these texts demonstrate the role of religious women in New Zealand society and the impact they had on communities through their mission work, whether it be centred in education, healthcare or social work.²¹

International sources build on these national trends and demonstrate the wider patterns in the work of religious women and more specifically the Sisters of Mercy. Caitriona Clear’s work *Nuns in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* demonstrates how the expansion and growth of the Sisters of Mercy is part of a wider Irish trend, which saw nineteenth-century women enter into convents at an unprecedented scale.²² Clear looks at why women were entering into convents in such large numbers, what type of women entered and for what reasons. This work is key to this study as these wider trends affecting convents throughout Ireland included the Sisters of Mercy. Margaret MacCurtain’s body of work also provides valuable background to the history of religious women in Ireland as well as the broader history of women in Irish society.²³ Her edited collections highlight the position of women, both lay and religious, in Irish society and recovers the stories of Irish women who had previously been largely ignored in Irish historiography.²⁴ Mary C. Sullivan’s work, *The Path of Mercy: The Life of Catherine McAuley*, fits into this Irish context providing a valuable background to the origins of the Order and the work of Catherine McAuley on the Streets of Dublin, which as will be seen throughout this thesis, had a direct influence on the work of the Aranui Sisters.²⁵ Other international studies of the Sisters of Mercy such as Luquet’s “The Contribution of the Sisters of Mercy to the

²⁰ Katie Pickles, “Colonial Sainthood in Australasia,” *National Identities* 7 (2005): 389-408.

²¹ There have also been studies such as: Jane Tolerton, *Convent Girls* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1994), which demonstrates the impact religious women had on students in New Zealand through their role in education.

²² Caitriona Clear, *Nuns in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1987), xvi.

²³ See: Margaret MacCurtain, “Late in the Field: Catholic Sisters in Twentieth-Century Ireland and the New Religious History,” *Journal of Women's History* 6 (1995): 49-63; Margaret MacCurtain, “The Role of Religion in Ireland: The Historical Dimension,” *Social Compass* 40 (1993): 7-13.

²⁴ See: Margaret MacCurtain and Donncha Ó Corráin ed., *Women in Irish Society: The Historical Dimension* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1979); Margaret MacCurtain and Mary O’Dowd ed., *Women In Early Modern Ireland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991).

²⁵ Mary C. Sullivan, *The Path of Mercy: The Life of Catherine McAuley* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2012).

Development of Social Welfare,” outlines their involvement in the development of social welfare in Ireland,²⁶ as well as, their contributions to medical care during the Crimean War.²⁷

Beyond Ireland, there are a number of texts, which demonstrate the wider international histories of the Sisters of Mercy. Mary Beth Fraser Connolly’s, *Women of Faith*, for example, traces the work of the Sisters of Mercy in Chicago from their early beginnings to the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. This work along with other American based research such as “The Sisters of Mercy: A Tale of Two Cities,” in Edward Rohs *Raised by the Church* and Dwain Hebda’s “Religious Sisters of Mercy of the Americas,” demonstrate the role the Sisters of Mercy filled in American society, which mostly focused around education, medical care and working in orphanages. Higgs and Evans in their study “Embracing Activism in Apartheid South Africa: The Sisters of Mercy in Bophuthatswana, 1974–94” focus on a different side to the social justice work of the Sisters of Mercy. This work provides a valuable link to the work of the Aranui Sisters as it shows how the Sisters of Mercy in Bophuthatswana, South Africa, saw a need for hunger relief, education and skills training at the community level. This demonstrates the way that the Sisters of Mercy responded to the call of the Second Vatican Council across the globe to meet the needs of the people on the street. Australian histories such as *These Women? Women Religious in the History of Australia - The Sisters of Mercy in Parramatta 1888-1988*, like Connolly’s work, gives a history of the Sisters of Mercy in the region tracing the shifts in their work before and after the Second Vatican Council. Other regional histories, such as, “Australian Sisters of Mercy as Missionaries in Papua New Guinea” provide a valuable case study of mission work carried out by the Sisters of Mercy and showcases how Mercy values are used globally with an emphasis on building up trust and helping people to help themselves. These histories of the Sisters of Mercy and religious women throughout New Zealand and internationally demonstrate the similarities faced by the different congregations throughout New Zealand and the world in adapting to the changes resulting from the Second Vatican Council. They also demonstrate the

²⁶ See: Wade Luquet, “The Contribution of the Sisters of Mercy to the Development of Social Welfare,” *Affilia* 20 (2005): 153–68.

²⁷ See: Maria Luddy ed., *The Crimean Journals of the Sisters of Mercy, 1854-56* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004); Mary Raphael Paradis, Edith Mary Hart, and Mary Judith O’Brien. “The Sisters of Mercy in the Crimean War: Lessons for Catholic Health Care,” *The Linacre Quarterly* 84 (2017): 29–43.

significance of living Mercy values in the modern world, particularly focusing on maintaining compassion for the vulnerable members of society.

As this thesis intends to recover the voices of women, women's history is an integral part of this study, not only because this work focuses on a particular group of religious women, but also because the nature of the work undertaken by the Aranui Sisters involved a number of women from the communities in which they worked. The importance of helping women to help themselves and combating loneliness among young mothers was central to their mission work in eastern Christchurch. It is for this reason that texts such as Sue Kedgley's *Mum's the Word*, Charlotte Macdonald's *The Vote, The Pill and the Demon Drink: A History of Feminist Writing in New Zealand 1869-1993*, and the work of Jenny Phillips on motherhood in New Zealand provide crucial context to this study by providing an understanding of the issues faced by women and particularly mothers in 1970s New Zealand.²⁸ They also demonstrate the place of women in New Zealand society both in the home and in the paid workforce. *Changing Times* by Jenny Carlyon and Dianna Morrow builds on these issues by exploring the ways in which the importance of the nuclear family was reiterated by the New Zealand government of the mid-1970s, including putting single mothers on the Domestic Purposes Benefit under increasing scrutiny to try and maintain the ideal family structure.²⁹

In *Cracks in the Glass Ceiling*, Joyce Herd explores the issue of educated women living in isolation in the suburbs as housewives and stay-at-home-mothers. She argues that these women ended up as "suburban cabbages", craving adult companionship and feeling as though their skills were being wasted.³⁰ The idea of the suburban cabbage has been drawn from Margot Roth's 1959 article "Housewives or human beings?". In this article, she argues that domesticity had been thrust upon women limiting their educational

²⁸ See: Sue Kedgley, *Mums the Word: The Untold Story of Motherhood in New Zealand*, (Auckland: Random House New Zealand Ltd., 1996); Charlotte Macdonald, *The Vote, The Pill and the Demon Drink: A History of Feminist Writing in New Zealand 1869-1993*, (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1993); Jenny Phillips, *Mothers Matter Too: A Book for New Zealand Women at Home* (Wellington: Reed, 1983); Jenny Phillips, *The Mother Manual: You Have a Manual for the Car, a Manual for the Garden - Here's One for You* (Auckland: Reed Methuen, 1986).

²⁹ Jenny Carlyon and Dianna Morrow, *Changing Times: New Zealand Since 1945* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2013), 74.

³⁰ Joyce Herd, *Cracks in the Glass Ceiling: New Zealand Women 1975-2004* (Dunedin: NZ Federation of Graduate Women, 2005), 31-33.

opportunities.³¹ This idea was again developed in the 1968 article “Who says I’m a Cabbage?” which claimed that suburban neurosis was causing depression in women and questioned whether women really were content devoting themselves to the home.³² In Carroll Smith-Rosenberg’s *The Body Politic*, this idea is developed further through the idea of the “cloistered home.” These women become trapped in their homes with no sense of community, slowly drawing in on themselves and negatively affecting their ability to cope as mothers and wives.³³ Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* is another important work, which highlights the issue of women being confined to the role of housewife. Friedan argues that the “problem that has no name” results in women living unfulfilled lives in the suburbs searching for something more than the everyday chores of a housewife.³⁴ These works are of importance to this study as they demonstrate the issues that were affecting everyday women. In their work *Communities of Women: Historical Perspectives*, Barbara Brookes and Dorothy Page develop the idea of community structures and their importance for women. They argued that shared transport networks, leisure activities, schools and churches provided women in the suburbs with a secure place in which to function socially.³⁵ The history of social welfare in New Zealand is also important to the context of the sisters’ work as will be seen throughout this thesis many of the people the sisters worked with were beneficiaries of the social welfare system especially those in Aranui. Margaret Tennant’s work *Paupers and Providers Charitable Aid in New Zealand* traces the development of the New Zealand Charitable aid system and shows how it influenced prevailing ideas in the 1970s about “dole bludgers” and the scapegoating of solo mothers as a burden on society.³⁶ Her work *The Fabric of Social Welfare* highlights the role of the state in social welfare and argues that voluntary agencies were often filling gaps in state welfare services, or complementing and

³¹ Margot Roth, “Housewives or Human Beings?” *The Listener* 41 (1959): 6-7.

³² “Who Says I’m a Cabbage?” *Thursday: The Magazine for Younger Women*, October 3, 1968, 28-31.

³³ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Body Politic,” in *Coming to Terms: Feminism, Theory, Politics*, ed. Elizabeth Weed (New York: Routledge, 1989), 105.

³⁴ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (United States of America: Penguin Books, 1963).

³⁵ Barbara Brookes and Dorothy Page, *Communities of Women: Historical Perspectives* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2002), 9.

³⁶ Margaret Tennant, *Paupers and Providers Charitable Aid in New Zealand* (Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1989).

reinforcing it.³⁷ This is particularly important, as will be developed later in this thesis, Sister Teresa argued in a 1979 interview that if the government put more care into community building it would improve social welfare.³⁸

In responding to MacCurtain's call for the recovery of the stories of religious women this thesis fills a gap in the historiography by celebrating the work of the Aranui Sisters of Mercy, which has been largely ignored in the existing historiography. This thesis highlights the voices of the sisters through the use of interviews and brings this together with the primary material held in archives around New Zealand. The secondary material places the work of the Aranui Sisters within the context of wider historiographical trends both within the Church and in twentieth-century New Zealand society. The voices of the sisters remain an important part in the telling of their story as their thoughts and reflections provide valuable insight into their motivations, struggles and triumphs throughout their work in Christchurch's eastern suburbs.

Primary Sources and Methodology

In order to answer the call of Margret MacCurtain and recover the voices of the Aranui Sisters an interview was conducted with the two surviving Sisters. This interview with Sisters Helen and Marie forms the basis of the primary source material for this thesis, drawing on their thoughts and reflections of their work in Christchurch's eastern suburbs. Subsequent interviews were also conducted with Father Kevin Burns, who worked closely alongside the sisters during their work with the North East Community Development Scheme, and Beverly McNabb a member of the Parish community who was heavily involved in many of the schemes' initiatives. These additional interviews help to provide a different perspective to the sisters' work and provide further reflection on the impact their mission had on the community. The three interviews are supplemented by other forms of life-writing, particularly those of Sister Pauline who wrote a number of texts about her life including her time in the east. Material held in the Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives and the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy is particularly valuable. The Villa Maria College Archive provided a valuable supplement to the voices of the sisters, as the

³⁷ Margaret Tennant, *The Fabric of Welfare: Voluntary Organisations, Government and Welfare in New Zealand, 1840-2005* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books Ltd., 2007).

³⁸ For more on social welfare see: Bronwyn Labrum, "'Bringing Families up to Scratch' The Distinctive Workings of Maori State Welfare, 1944-1970," *New Zealand Journal of History* 36 (2002): 161-184.

College was founded by the Sisters of Mercy and many of the Aranui Sisters taught there before moving to Aranui. Newspaper articles from papers such as *The Press* and other local newspapers also provide valuable primary material that helps to demonstrate how the sisters' work was viewed at the time.

It is the intent of this thesis that the voices of the sisters are heard throughout. An interview with Sister Helen and Sister Marie was carried out which highlights their thoughts and reflections on their work and the impact they had on the community, providing a valuable understanding of how the changes in the wider Catholic Church motivated these women to make the move from convent life out into the suburbs. The interview also explores the goals the sisters set and what they hoped to achieve by making the move, as well as, some of the difficulties they faced including being accepted by the community and earning the support of the Sisters of Mercy in the Christchurch Diocese. This interview takes a similar methodological approach to Alistair Thomson in his work *Moving Stories, Women's Lives: Sharing Authority in Oral History*, as it aims to hear the testimonies of these women and present their interpretation of their lives and work in the east.³⁹ In order to ensure that the voices of their deceased sisters are heard throughout this thesis interviews and speeches given by Sisters Teresa and Pauline are drawn upon, as well as, Sister Pauline's autobiography *A Changing Order* and other published texts. However, bringing out the voices of Sisters Monica and Colleen is more challenging. Both Monica and Colleen left little trace in the written historical record. We know from the writings of the other Sisters that they were there working alongside them in the community, but they left no known writings of their own from which their voices can be recovered. This can be attributed in part, to their joining the mission later in 1976 and in the case of Sister Colleen her death during the early stages of the Parklands mission in 1984.

By using additional interviews with Father Kevin Burns and Beverly McNabb, a greater understanding of the impact of the sisters' work is able to be achieved. Father Kevin worked alongside the sisters as Parish Priest at the North East Parish throughout the sisters' time in Burwood and Parklands. While Beverly McNabb was a member of the Burwood Parish and was heavily involved in many of the groups established by the North East Community Development Scheme. The interview with Father Kevin explores his

³⁹ Alistair Thomson, "Moving Stories, Women's Lives: Sharing Authority in Oral History," *Oral History* 39 (2011): 73-82.

reasons for inviting the sisters to join him in the Parish, the nature of their work together and what they hoped to achieve through their work in the area. The interview also reflects on their involvement in the North East Energy Group and the cross-denominational nature of their work within the community. Beverly's interview explores her perceptions of the area upon moving to Burwood in 1973 and reflects on the many ways in which her life has been shaped by her involvement in the North East Community Development programme and the many groups that stemmed from it. Beverly's reflections particularly highlight the significance and strength of the relationships developed as a result of community engagement, many of which still remain forty years on from when she became involved in the sisters' work. Through interviewing Father Kevin and Beverly, new perspectives are able to be gained on the work of the sisters.

In recovering the voices of the sisters, the life-writing of Sister Pauline has been used throughout this study as it provides valuable insight into the lives and work of the Aranui Sisters. These texts which help to recover the stories of these women include *Aunts and Windmills*, *There is Hope for a Tree*, and *Miles to Go*. These texts all provide insight into key points in Pauline's life from her early childhood in *Aunts and Windmills*, her travels on the Winston Churchill Fellowship in *There is Hope for a Tree*, to her experience of old age in *Miles to Go*. Pauline's works, while they focus on her life and experience demonstrate many of her personal beliefs driving her and her fellow Sisters' work in the East. Her other works *Community Give It A Go!* and *I Can Change Anything (But Not on my Own): A Manual on Community Work*, co-authored with Sister Teresa O'Connor, are valuable works outlining how to undertake community development work following the example set by the Aranui Sisters and their North East Development Community Scheme. These how-to-guides explain how to set up community groups, how to ensure these groups flourish, and how to know when a group has lived out its course and how to disband it. These texts place a strong emphasis on the importance of leadership and support, which was central to the work undertaken by the Aranui Sisters.

Local archives have provided valuable material to supplement the voices and stories of the sisters. The Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives provides a wealth of material including speeches given by the sisters at various public events and conferences, letters and correspondence between the sisters, the Congregation and the Bishop of Christchurch, as well as, letters and cards written by the people the sisters worked alongside in the community. The Archive of the Sisters of Mercy provides letters written

by the Aranui Sisters to the Congregation in the early stages of their work in Aranui. These letters provide a valuable insight into the events of those early years as well as the thoughts and reflections of the original three sisters. Other material in the archive such as cartoons and articles written by Sister Pauline are also used to contextualise the work of these women in the community and the impact they had on local people. Prior to their move to the east, the Aranui Sisters lived and worked at Villa Maria College educating young Catholic women. The Villa Maria College Archive provides a number of photographs of the sisters and evidence of their work at the school through yearbooks and other written material.

Newspaper articles provide another source for the voices of the sisters. They consist of interviews conducted over their years working in the East and material written by the sisters themselves, including an article by Sister Pauline on equality and social justice.⁴⁰ Obituaries are also used as a means of understanding how those of the sisters who have passed away are remembered for their work and contributions to the community. These are particularly important forms of source material for researching the lives of Sister's Colleen and Monica who passed away in 1984 and 2001 respectively. Obituaries for Sister Teresa and Sister Pauline are also used, but as they left an extensive written record of their thoughts and actions they are not as heavily relied upon as for Sisters Colleen and Monica.

Biographical Overview

Each Sister had her own unique background and training which they brought to the Aranui mission. The following individual biographies of each Sister provides context to their lives and demonstrates the unique attributes each sister brought to their shared mission. These biographies reveal how while each of these women came from a different background, they were all united in their common faith and sense of mission and complemented each other through the different skills they brought to the mission.

Sister Teresa O'Connor was born in Timaru on 3 February 1928. In 1946 at the age of eighteen, she joined the Sisters of Mercy in Timaru and was professed on 4 January 1949

⁴⁰ Pauline O'Regan, "The Path to Equality," *The Press*, January 5, 2000.

taking the name, Sister Mary Francesca.⁴¹ Teresa moved to the Mercy Teacher Training Facility in Lyttelton where she gained her teacher's certificate. While at the Training Facility, she also completed an Arts Degree in English and Music with some Science units at what was then known as Canterbury University College. Teresa taught maths and science; first at Sacred Heart College in Timaru where she taught from 1953 before moving to Villa Maria College in 1955 as Deputy Principal. Teresa spent seventeen years at Villa Maria taking the position of Principal in 1967 before moving to Aranui in 1973.⁴² Teresa died on 31 March 2011 and is buried in the Waimairi Cemetery.⁴³ Throughout her mission work as part of the Aranui project Teresa worked closely with single mothers and was a driving force behind the formation of the North East Community Development Scheme.

Sister Helen Goggin was born in Christchurch in August 1929, the youngest of five children. She was educated at St Mary's Parish primary school and St Mary's College secondary school, and also received piano and speech lessons. Helen entered the novitiate of the Sisters of Mercy in Timaru in 1948 and was professed as a Sister in January 1951. She then spent a year at the Mercy Sisters Teacher Training Facility in Lyttelton, afterwards returning to St Mary's College as a music teacher. In 1955, Helen was both a school and music teacher in Timaru before returning to Christchurch in 1957 where she taught at Villa Maria College. Throughout her time as a teacher, Helen gained her BA extramurally from the University of Canterbury and gained her L.T.C.L. (piano) and A.T.C.L. (speech) from Trinity College of London.⁴⁴

Sister Pauline O'Regan was born on 28 June 1922 and grew up on the West Coast in the small town of Cronadun. She attended secondary school for two years at the Greymouth convent boarding school, before making the decision not to return. Instead, Pauline enrolled in correspondence school for a year before taking a teaching position in Tutaki at the age of sixteen where she remained for two terms before being transferred to

⁴¹ Villa Maria College Archive, "Sister Teresa O'Connor 1928-2011," *Villa's Sisters Display*, 2019/219.2.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Sister Teresa O'Connor, *The Press*, April 1, 2011.

⁴⁴ Sister Marie McCrea and Helen Goggin, email message to author, November 23, 2019.



VILLA MARIA STAFF — 1971

Back Row (from left): Sr Margaret Lister, Miss P. Edward, Mrs L. Moore, Mrs D. Glynan, Mrs D. Read, Mr W. Just, Mrs J. Gifford, Mr K. Moynihan, Mrs M. Davenport, Sr Marie McCrea, Mrs E. Berry.
 Middle Row: Sr Anne, Mrs J. Stott, Sr Bernadette, Sr Margaret Brosnan, Mrs J. Lewandowski, Miss B. Walker, Sr Moira, Mrs A. Johns, Sr Pauline McGrath, Mrs J. Travaglia.
 Front Row: Sr Miriam, Mrs J. Dodd, Miss J. Finlay, Sr Pauline O'Regan, Sr Teresa, Sr Marie, Sr Helen, Mrs D. Turner, Sr Mary Dynan.
 Absent: Sr M. Leonard, Sr Hilary.

Figure 1: The sisters in 1971 on the staff at Villa Maria before they left for Aranui. Sisters Pauline, Teresa and Helen can be seen sitting in the centre front. (Source: Villa Maria School Archive, *Villa Maria College Yearbook*, 1971, 2020.1.14, 5).

Waitahu.⁴⁵ In January 1942, Pauline entered the Sisters of Mercy convent in Timaru and professed her final vows before Bishop Lyons on 5 September 1944.⁴⁶ Her first posting was at Loreto College, before moving to her old school in Greymouth and then on to St Mary's in Christchurch. During her time at St Mary's Pauline gained her B.A. in history from Canterbury University College, and in 1950, she was appointed as principal at Villa Maria College at the age of twenty-eight and completed her M.A. under the supervision of Professor Neville Phillips.⁴⁷ Pauline remained at Villa Maria for seventeen years, where she worked alongside many of the sisters who would later become part of the Aranui Mission (see Figure 1), before being appointed assistant to the Reverend Mother which saw her move to Timaru for two years. She then returned to Christchurch as Superior at Villa

⁴⁵ Pauline O'Regan, *A Changing Order* (Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 2013), 58-60.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

Maria before moving to Aranui.⁴⁸ Through her work in Aranui Pauline became the face of the Aranui mission as her many books brought public attention to the work she and her fellow sister were carrying out in the Eastern Suburbs. Pauline passed away on 2 May 2019, aged 96.⁴⁹

Sister Monica Stack was born in 1918 and grew up in Timaru. She joined the Sisters of Mercy in Timaru in 1936 and began her ministry as a primary school teacher before moving to secondary teaching at Villa Maria where she was Principal in 1970 and 1971. Monica began working in the field of Religious Education as a C.C.D. (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine) Team Leader. She always maintained a strong desire to work alongside people in their community and joined the Aranui mission in 1976.⁵⁰ Sister Monica died on 3 December 2001.⁵¹ Throughout her work as part of the Aranui Sisters, Monica worked behind the scenes working alongside her fellow sisters but left little trace in the written historical record. She was a valued member of the Aranui community and Pauline dedicated her book *Miles to Go*, “To the memory of our dearly loved community member, Monica Stack rsm.”⁵²

Like Sister Monica, Sister Colleen McBride left little trace in the written historical record about her time as an Aranui Sister. Colleen was born in Whataroa, on the West Coast in 1928. She joined the Sisters of Mercy in 1947 at the age of nineteen and worked as a primary school teacher from 1951 to 1964. After an overseas Catechetical training course, she worked in the C.C.D. providing religious education for students not enrolled in Catholic schools. In 1975, Colleen joined the National Catechetical Team in Wellington before joining the Aranui mission in 1976. Colleen was a strong advocate for social justice

⁴⁸ Ibid., 91.

⁴⁹ “Pauline Margaret CBE DCNZM (Sister) O’REGAN RSM.” *NZ Herald*, May 4, 2019.

⁵⁰ Sisters of Mercy Congregation Archives, Archivist Stephanie Kitching, email message to author, November 6, 2019.

⁵¹ Sister Monica Stack, *The Press*, December 4, 2001.

⁵² Pauline O’Regan, *Miles to Go: A Book to Make You Laugh Out Loud* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2004).

and was arrested for protesting during the 1981 Springbok Tour.⁵³ She died on 8 February 1984.⁵⁴

Sister Marie McCrea was born in August 1940, the eldest of six children, attending St Joseph's Primary School in Papanui and St Mary's Secondary School in Christchurch. From 1958 to 1959, she trained at the Christchurch Teacher's College, before entering the novitiate of the Sisters of Mercy in January 1960 and was professed as a Sister of Mercy on September 5, 1962. In 1963, Marie taught at Villa Maria College before moving to St Mary's in Greymouth where she taught for two terms. She then returned to Villa Maria where she taught Latin, Maths and Christian Living from 1968 to 1973. In 1974, she spent a year at the National Pastoral Institute of Religious Education in Elsternwick, Melbourne. Marie returned to Villa Maria before moving to join the Aranui Community in 1977 in their new community of Burwood. Marie worked as a social worker during her time in the East, working alongside Catholic Social Services and working at Christchurch Hospital during her time as breadwinner for the community. Marie continued her training throughout her work in the east gaining her Certificate of Social Work from the University of Canterbury in 1980 and became a certified Clinical Transactional Analyst through completing her training as a Transactional Analyst in 1992. Marie's work with the North East Community Development Scheme focused on offering counselling, psychotherapy, supervision and running of courses and offering training to volunteers.⁵⁵

This group of likeminded women worked together as a team bringing together their different skill sets to try and make a difference in the community. As will be seen in this thesis, the original three Sisters came together through their work at Villa Maria College, later to be joined by three more Sisters who had heard of their mission and felt drawn to the sisters' work in Aranui.

⁵³ Sisters of Mercy Congregation Archives, Archivist Stephanie Kitching, email message to author, November 6, 2019.

⁵⁴ Sister Colleen McBride, *The Press*, February 10, 1984.

⁵⁵ Sister Marie McCrea and Helen Goggin, email message to author, November 23, 2019.

The East

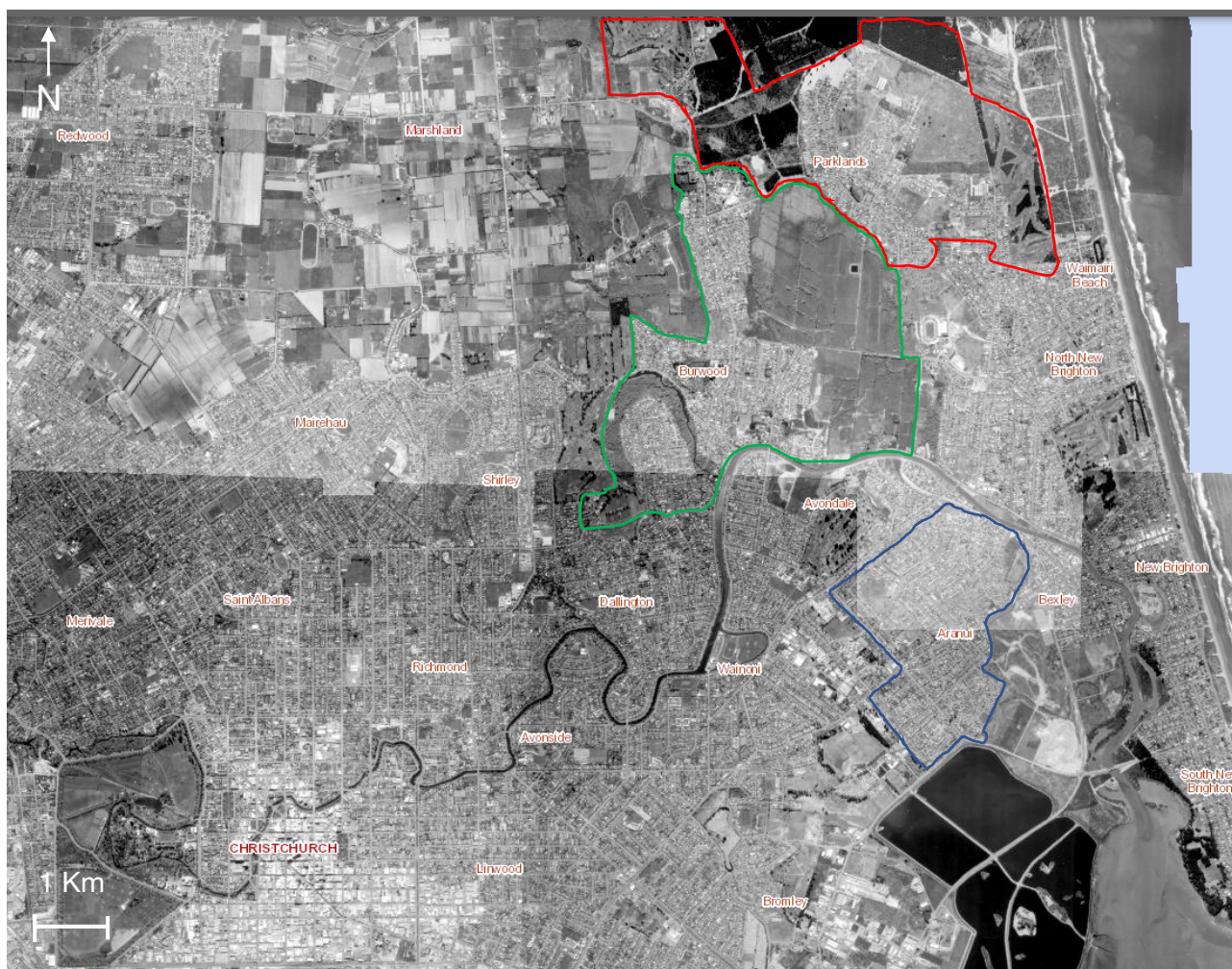


Figure 2: Satellite Image of Eastern Suburbs 1980-1984 showing Aranui (Blue), Burwood (Green) and Parklands (Red). (Source: Environment Canterbury, Canterbury Maps, Accessed 24 February 2020).

The sisters' work saw them move out into the eastern suburbs of Christchurch, which can be broadly defined as the suburbs located to the east of Christchurch's central business district. Figure 2 shows the three suburbs in which the sisters focused their mission work with Aranui shown in blue, Burwood in green and Parklands in red. When the Sisters arrived in Aranui in 1973, the area had a strong reputation for violence and low levels of education,⁵⁶ particularly for women, compared with other suburbs in Christchurch City (see Appendix One). On the sisters' street, alone the families they worked alongside were dealing with a range of issues including loneliness, domestic violence, financial troubles and unhappy marriages (see Appendix Two). Aranui also had some of the highest benefit rates in Christchurch with the highest number of women on the Domestic Purposes Benefit and Family Benefit in 1976. In contrast, benefit rates in Burwood remained

⁵⁶ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 17.

average in comparison with Aranui, but both suburbs experienced a drop in marriage rates and an increase in rates of divorce, separation and remarriage (see Appendix One). Burwood was home to the North East Parish where the sisters based the new phase of their mission work in 1977. Through their work with the parish, the sisters established the North East Community Development Scheme and engaged in several community groups, including coffee groups, gardening groups, sports ladders, literary groups and many more (see Appendix Three for a full list). Located next to Burwood was the new suburb of Parklands. Established in 1976 it became an important part of the sisters' ministry as when they first arrived in the area in 1977 there were few amenities (as will be seen in Chapter Four), prompting the sisters to refer to the area as a "social wasteland" as it lacked the facilities for people in the community to engage with one another. Parklands developed quickly from 1977, with a dairy, petrol station and doctor's surgery opening. Two primary schools, two kindergartens, and a community centre also opened later to be joined by a shopping centre and supermarket in 1982.⁵⁷ The suburb remained an important part of the sisters' ministry with a number of the groups developed by the North East Community Development Scheme aimed directly at Parklands residents including the Parklands Game Night, Parklands Action Group and Parklands Alternative Education Group (see Appendix 3).

Thesis Structure

Chapter One begins by placing the work of the Aranui Sisters within the broader context of church history, tracing the history of the Sisters of Mercy from their origins in Dublin and the influence that founder Catherine McAuley continued to have on the sisters throughout their work. It demonstrates the ways in which the Second Vatican Council shaped their work and the effect this had on Catholics in the mid-twentieth century. It will also highlight how the sisters' testimony suggests that the effects of the Second Vatican Council were more far-reaching than historians have suggested. This chapter also explores the sisters' motivations for moving to Aranui. They hoped that through their work they would be able to bring communities together and alleviate some of the issues, particularly loneliness, which affected many people in the community. This chapter will argue that the work of the Aranui Sisters would not have been possible without the reform of the Catholic Church resulting from Vatican II and the sisters' own strong connection to

⁵⁷ Katie Pickles, email message to author, February 27, 2020.

Catherine McAuley and the example she set through her own work on the streets of Dublin.

Chapter Two focuses on the move to Aranui and the work the sisters did within the community as part of their mission to provide support and a sense of community for the vulnerable members of society. Much of this early work focused on women as they were often left at home all day with only their children as company. This chapter will show that many of these women suffered from isolation and loneliness as they had limited support networks, with solo mothers being particularly vulnerable. Chapter Two argues that through establishing relationships with members of the community and living and working alongside them the sisters were able to alleviate this isolation and begin building a sense of community that had not previously existed.

Chapter Three looks at the success of the mission alongside some of the challenges they faced in their work, with particular reference to their relationship with the rest of the Christchurch Congregation. This chapter demonstrates the strong sense of dedication the sisters felt to their mission as their relationship with the rest of the Christchurch Congregation became strained. Throughout their conflict with the Congregation, the sisters remained committed to their work in Aranui working to make a difference in the lives of many women and developing a sense of community in the area. An evaluation carried out on the sisters' work in Aranui demonstrates the extent to which their mission succeeded, with various community leaders reflecting positively on their work, including the local Parish Priest and principal of Aranui High School. This chapter argues that the sisters' dedication to the area and strong sense of purpose was one of the main reasons for its success.

Chapter Four explores the sisters' work in Parklands and Burwood as part of the North East Community Development Scheme, breaking down isolation and responding to the needs of women in the suburbs. This chapter will demonstrate how the North East Community Development Scheme worked to build a sense of community in the eastern suburbs. The scheme worked to empower local women to become involved in the work of the scheme and allowed members of the community to become part of its development.

Chapter Five examines a community in action through the North East Energy Group protest, before looking at the closure of the scheme and evaluating its success. The North East Energy Group provides an example of the sisters' philosophy in action, as it showcases how community can work together breaking down the barriers of isolation to stand up for justice. This chapter will also explore the long-term success of the mission the eastern suburbs arguing that it was a success and achieved the goal the sisters set out to achieve. This chapter will conclude by looking at the closure of the scheme as the sisters sought to step back from developing community groups turning their attention to the groups already active in the community.

Throughout this study, I aim to place the work of the Aranui Sisters in the broader context of women's history and the issues that effected everyday women in late-twentieth-century New Zealand. This thesis will demonstrate that the work of the Aranui Sisters of Mercy was a successful example of community engagement that benefitted the lives of many people living in the communities they worked in. This mission was particularly successful as it met the goals set out by the sisters to engage the community and to help facilitate relationships between neighbours. One notable aspect of their mission was its engagement of women, providing them with a sense of community and the opportunities to develop their personal skills. This mission demonstrates that when communities are engaged and brought together social issues such as loneliness begin to fade.

Chapter One

Out of the Habit

Sometime around ten o'clock on a cold winter's night in 1971, Sister Helen came down stairs to the old kitchen at Villa Maria College to make a hot lemon drink for one of the boarders who was suffering from a cold. Upon entering, she found more than just what was needed to make a lemon drink, as she stumbled upon a conversation between Sisters Pauline and Teresa that would eventually lead to a drastic change in the course of their mission work. The pair had just come back from a meeting for their course on adolescent counselling and were discussing the situation in the suburbs and what they could do to help solve the issues of isolation and loneliness. Having made the lemon drink, Helen prepared to leave but said to Teresa and Pauline before she went, "keep going, don't go away I want to come back and join this."⁵⁸ After she returned, the three sisters sat and discussed what they thought needed to be done to solve the problems faced by those living in the suburbs. By 1:30am, they had made the decision to seek permission to trade the convent life they had known since joining the Sisters of Mercy for a small statehouse in the suburbs.⁵⁹ In the words of Sister Helen,

That night we decided we would make a move and that move would be to Aranui. We knew the name and that's about all, but we knew that our foundress Catherine McAuley worked amongst the poorest women on the streets of Dublin so we looked at what we thought would be the most needy area at the time and we decided on Aranui.⁶⁰

In 1971, a move out of convent life to live amongst the poor in the suburbs was a radical decision to make. The Church was only just coming to terms with the effects of the Second Vatican Council, which saw the Church implement a series of changes as it slowly began its renewal.⁶¹ The decision Pauline, Teresa and Helen made to move out into the community was not, however, a new concept for the Church as the Order of the Sisters of Mercy had been founded upon the idea of living and working amongst the poor and vulnerable. Over time, this had changed into a focus primarily on school teaching and

⁵⁸ Sister Helen Goggin, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

⁵⁹ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 105.

⁶⁰ Sister Helen Goggin, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

⁶¹ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 87-90.

educating Catholic children. For the Aranui Sisters their mission work had focused around educating the next generation of Catholics since they had joined the Order in the 1940s and 50s, working in Catholic schools far removed from the wider community. It was this work that the Aranui Sisters were asking to leave as they sought to return to the work of their founder Catherine McAuley, providing help and support for the poor and vulnerable.

In this chapter, I explore the origins of the Sisters of Mercy and the work of Catherine McAuley who remained a strong influence on the Aranui Sisters throughout their mission work in the east. I also explore how the Order grew and expanded globally with particular attention given to the wider trends of mission work within the Order. This chapter will also look at the effects of the Second Vatican Council on the Catholic Church and the influence this had on the direction of the Aranui Sisters' mission. This chapter will conclude with the reasons for the sisters' decision to move into the east and look at the factors that motivated them change the direction of their mission.

Origins of the Sisters of Mercy

The founder of the Sisters of Mercy Cathrine McAuley, her spirit and charism,⁶² has remained an important source of inspiration for the Sisters of Mercy since her death in 1841. Her life and work on the streets of Dublin amongst the poor and her attitudes towards helping those in need provides one of the major influences for the Aranui Sisters in making the move from the convent to the suburbs.⁶³

When Cathrine McAuley opened the doors to her Baggot Street House of Mercy in 1827, she had not intended to establish a new religious order. Originally, she had planned to establish "a society of pious secular ladies," who could devote themselves to her work serving the poor while maintaining the freedom to return to their normal lives should they wish.⁶⁴ Catherine and her "pious ladies" welcomed homeless women and girls, as well as, unemployed or barely employed servant girls providing them with shelter and support. As Caitriona Clear says, women in mid-nineteenth-century Ireland were particularly

⁶² In religious terms a charism is a spiritual gift granted by God to an individual, in this case Catherine McAuley, not for their own interest but for the benefit of others.

⁶³ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 105; Sister Helen Goggin and Sister Marie McCrea, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

⁶⁴ Sullivan, *The Path of Mercy*, 64-65.

susceptible to poverty and while charity organisations provided relief for women priority was often given to those women with children and “aged respectable destitute females”.⁶⁵ Catherine and her ladies provided care to anyone in need. They walked the streets of Dublin in pairs wearing modest black dresses, they prayed together each morning and walked to Sunday mass together.⁶⁶ However, to the outside world, they resembled an organised congregation and the perception that they were an unofficial Order caused tensions with the church episcopacy. Catherine was eventually forced by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Daniel Murray, to turn her work into a religious congregation. She was instructed to write to existing female orders for copies of their rules and to choose the order with the rules and lifestyle best suited to her current work. Catherine and her “pious ladies” could then request temporary admission into the congregation and profess their vows under the sanction of Archbishop Murray, thus forming the Order of the Sisters of Mercy.⁶⁷ They became part of a growing number of female religious orders in Ireland in the nineteenth century working to provide education and relief to the poor.⁶⁸

For Catherine, it was important that when establishing her new religious order voluntary, poverty should become an essential element of their religious life. She saw it as a necessity if her Sisters were to live in solidarity with the poor and vulnerable and follow the example set for them by Christ.⁶⁹ It was also essential to their work that her sisters remain un-cloistered. Along with their autonomous form of government, this allowed them to be more useful in the community and far more adaptable to local conditions than other cloistered female religious orders working in Dublin at the time.⁷⁰ The sisters quickly earned themselves the name the “walking sisters” or the “walking nuns” through their work in the community as they often travelled in pairs walking amongst the poor and travelling between the convent, schools, orphanages, hospitals and homes for women to

⁶⁵ Caitriona Clear, *Nuns in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Gill and Macmillan Ltd: Dublin, 1987), 5.

⁶⁶ Sullivan, *The Path of Mercy*, 84-85.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 92-96.

⁶⁸ Clear, *Nuns in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, 50-52.

⁶⁹ Mary Beth Fraser Connolly, *Women of Faith: The Chicago Sisters of Mercy and the Evolution of a Religious Community* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 3.

⁷⁰ Madeline Sophie McGrath, *These Women? Women Religious in the History of Australia - The Sisters of Mercy Parramatta 1888-1988* (Australia: News South Wales University Press, 1989), 9.

provide counselling, education, health care, encouragement and vocational training.⁷¹ From their early beginnings, then, the Sisters of Mercy, worked at street level within the city helping individuals at the level of the street and were never cloistered away, like many female religious orders before them.

The sisters first made a name for themselves as nurses through their work in caring for cholera patients in an epidemic that struck Dublin in 1832. Many believed that if they went to the hospital they would be poisoned and out of fear hid their symptoms rather than seeking much-needed help. However, the confidence the people of Dublin had in Catherine's "walking nuns" meant that when they heard the Sisters of Mercy were working at the hospital they overcame these fears and began taking their sick to the hospital for treatment.⁷² Catherine had established herself as a nurse through observation and her sisters established a method of caring for patients in an environment of compassion and faith.⁷³ Their skills as nurses served as the basis for the Orders first major public engagement outside of their ministry work on the streets of Dublin. They met the call for skilled nurses in the Crimean War, working alongside Florence Nightingale to improve the conditions of military hospitals for wounded soldiers. The sisters helped to improve sanitation, provide adequate meals to wounded soldiers, and cared for the soldiers physical and spiritual needs, particularly for the Irish men.⁷⁴ They practised what is now referred to as "patient-centred care,"⁷⁵ gaining the respect of the doctors and other nurses they worked alongside.

The autonomous form of government that Catherine established early on in the foundation of her order allowed the Sisters of Mercy to expand rapidly to twelve independent foundations across Ireland, as well as, two in England within ten years.⁷⁶ In setting up autonomous convents, Catherine placed the authority in the hands of the convent leaders. She did not want to be seen as an authority figure like a mother general,

⁷¹ Connolly, *Women of Faith*, 46; Luquet, "The Contribution of the Sisters of Mercy to the Development of Social Welfare," 156.

⁷² Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Evaluation of North East Community Development Scheme (Sisters of Mercy) Experimental Community*, 2018.15.19.

⁷³ Paradis, et al., "The Sisters of Mercy in the Crimean War," 30.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁷⁶ McGrath, *These Women? Women Religious in the History of Australia*, 9-10.

instead implementing a system of “branch” houses which allowed the sisters to spread out beyond the main centres to wherever their acts of mercy were needed.⁷⁷ This allowed for quick and easy expansion of the Sisters of Mercy throughout Ireland and overseas, reaching from North America to the South Pacific. Catherine’s vision for helping vulnerable men and women at the level of the street with her un-cloistered nuns meant that her Sisters were able to work directly with those in need moving to wherever their acts of Mercy were required.

Global Expansion of the Order

From its origins at Baggot Street in Dublin, the Sisters of Mercy gradually expanded throughout Ireland and into England wherever a need for the sisters’ work was found. Together with the Presentation order, the Sisters of Mercy accounted for 58 per cent of all Irish convents, forming part of a wider spiritual empire throughout Ireland.⁷⁸ This expansion eventually led to a global spread into places such as America, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand in the late nineteenth century. As the Order expanded, each new House of Mercy remained autonomous in keeping with Catherine McAuley’s original vision when sending out her early groups of nuns from Dublin that each new group should develop autonomously within its own local church. The sisters provided for themselves financially and made their own decisions independent of the House from which they had originated.⁷⁹ This allowed the Order to spread internationally and meet the needs of the poor across the globe in a number of different areas. For example, in nineteenth-century America, there was a need to establish a House of Mercy like the one in Dublin for young, vulnerable women in the sometimes harsh urban environment of New York.⁸⁰ The Sisters of Mercy also expanded into other parts of America as the need grew with at least one Mercy Hospital in every major city and nineteen Mercy sponsored colleges and

⁷⁷ Teresa A. Flaherty, “Australian Sisters of Mercy as Missionaries in Papua New Guinea: Following Paths of Mercy beside Peoples of Ancient Melanesian Cultures.” *The Australasian Catholic Record*, 49.

⁷⁸ Clear, *Nuns in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, 52.

⁷⁹ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 81.

⁸⁰ Edward Rohs, and Judith Estrine. “The Sisters of Mercy: A Tale of Two Cities,” in *Raised by the Church Growing up in New York City’s Catholic Orphanages: Growing up in New York City’s Catholic Orphanages* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 27.

universities.⁸¹ In a later period in South Africa, the needs of the people were different from those of nineteenth-century America. The Sisters of Mercy, who were working to provide education in the area, fought to keep their mission schools open in the wake of the Bantu Education Act (1953) as their mission schools were their main form of contact with African children. The sisters fought to continue their work despite the issues caused by apartheid as their primary concern was in helping the poor and vulnerable.

In countries like Australia, New Zealand and the United States the Sisters of Mercy often found themselves providing much-needed education. The role of the Sisters of Mercy in the Church's educational ministry saw them establish schools across the globe. This saw a change in focus as many congregations became entrenched in their role as educators of the Catholic youth and moved away from their other forms of ministry. Like many congregations across the globe in Australia, the Sisters of Mercy drifted further away from the front-line action seen in the early work of the sisters during the Irish Cholera plague and the Crimean War. This meant women were more reluctant to enter into the convent as they were less likely to engage with Catholic social action in the community.⁸² With the opening of the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s, this began to shift and the Sisters of Mercy began to return to other forms of mission work outside of education. For the Australian congregation, this saw participation in missions to Papua New Guinea, led by Sister Clare Gilchrist, where they helped improve women's lives through health and education. This work aimed to empower the indigenous people through education working within the national high schools.⁸³ This pattern can also be seen in New Zealand as the Sisters of Mercy made a similar transition in the wake of the Second Vatican Council from education-based ministry back to meeting the needs of the vulnerable.

The Sisters of Mercy Arrive in New Zealand

The first Sisters of Mercy to arrive in New Zealand landed in Auckland in 1850, quickly establishing themselves in the community through visiting the sick and bereaved as well

⁸¹ Luquet, "The Contribution of the Sisters of Mercy to the Development of Social Welfare," 156.

⁸² McGrath, *These Women? Women Religious in the History of Australia*, 148.

⁸³ Flaherty, "Australian Sisters of Mercy as Missionaries in Papua New Guinea," 57.

as teaching Māori women and their children alongside the children of the early settlers.⁸⁴ Having learnt Te Reo Māori on the voyage to New Zealand, the sisters were able to establish themselves within the Māori community where they were affectionately known as the *wāhine tapu*, the holy women.⁸⁵ The Sisters of Mercy quickly spread throughout the country forming communities in places such as Dunedin, Wellington, Takapuna, Greymouth, Blenheim, Hokitika and Christchurch. In many of these communities, the Sisters of Mercy came with the purpose to teach. With the passing of the 1877 Education Act, all state aid to denominational schools was withdrawn, placing the burden of maintaining the schools and the payment of teachers' salaries on the Catholic community.⁸⁶ To alleviate the issue nuns were brought in to teach at the Catholic schools throughout the country as they did not require a paid salary, eliminating running costs for the schools.

The Sisters of Mercy first arrived in the South Island in 1878, departing from St. Xavier's Mercy Convent in Ennis for the West Coast gold mining town of Hokitika. The sisters established schools across the West Coast in small towns such as Kaniere, Ross, Kumara and Rimu.⁸⁷ They became part of a number of religious orders including the Society of Mary and the Marist Brothers working to serve the Catholic population of the West Coast and the wider Christchurch Diocese.⁸⁸ The main focus of this early mission work on the West Coast was focused on providing education. Bishop Redwood invited a number of Orders to establish convents throughout the Christchurch Diocese including the Sisters of Mercy who became part of the growing network of religious women.⁸⁹ The Sisters of Mercy established independent Houses in Greymouth, Lyttelton and St Mary's Christchurch, these houses were amalgamated in 1918, uniting the four convents under one Mother Superior.⁹⁰ The sisters were asked to teach at St Joseph's school in Papanui as well as staffing their own St Mary's and Villa Maria Colleges. When St Teresa's and Our

⁸⁴ Marcienne D Kirk RSM. *Remembering your Mercy: Mother Mary Cecilia Maher and the First Sisters of Mercy in New Zealand 1850-1880* (Auckland: Sisters of Mercy, 1998), 6.

⁸⁵ *Gracious is the Time*, 54.

⁸⁶ Mercy Centennial Planning Committee, *Reflect Rejoice*, 12.

⁸⁷ Burke, *Mercy Thought the Years*, 9-14.

⁸⁸ Fraser, *Castles of Gold*, 116-117.

⁸⁹ O'Meeghan, *Held Firm by Faith*, 146-149.

⁹⁰ Burke, *Mercy Thought the Years*, 14.

Lady of Victories Schools were opened in 1936 and 1955 respectively the Sisters of Mercy were asked to supply staff from the Villa Maria convent to teach at the new schools.⁹¹ As needs for new schools in the Diocese arose the Sisters of Mercy were called upon to supply teachers. The Sisters of Mercy met these needs following patterns seen in other parts of New Zealand and overseas where the primary focus of their mission was to provide a quality affordable education for Catholic youth. What started as filling a need for teachers in response to the 1877 Education Act and the withdrawal of state aid to denominational schools eventually resulted in the sisters teaching and running increasingly middle-class schools.⁹² With the passing of the 1975 Private Schools Conditional Integration Act, the funding crisis faced by many Catholic schools became less of an issue, allowing for the appointment of lay teachers and freeing religious women to move into other areas of mission work, such as the Aranui Mission.⁹³

Reform and Renewal

It was not until the Second Vatican Council called for religious women to return to the charism of their founders that the Congregation began to alter their mission work to better reflect the needs of modern-day society. In 1962, Pope John XXIII opened The Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican (Vatican II) in the hopes of renewing the church and bringing it into modern times. This was one of the most significant events in the recent history of the Catholic Church and it affected the lives of both religious men and women as well as the laity. The council, which ended in 1965 under Pope Paul VI, implemented a number of changes to the lives of religious men and women. These included an “updated renewal of religious life” calling for religious to return to the original inspiration of their founders and adapt these to fit the conditions of modern life.⁹⁴ It called for the translation of the Gospel and the actions of Christ into contemporary society.⁹⁵ As a 1980s view from

⁹¹ Ibid., 52-53.

⁹² Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

⁹³ Megan Cook, “Private Education - Private Schools, 1820s to 1990s,” *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, June 20, 2012. Accessed August 9, 2019, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/private-education/page-2>; Sweetman, “A Fair and Just Solution?”.

⁹⁴ O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council*, 33-34.

⁹⁵ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

the Sisters of Mercy Archive shows, Vatican II was not just about reform but also about a much deeper renewal of the Church. It called upon religious to not just pull their socks up but to “check if they were wearing the right ones in the first place”.⁹⁶ Other important changes included using the vernacular in mass as opposed to the traditional Latin, encouraging involvement in Parish communities from the laity and the adoption of a more modern form of dress for religious women.

For the Christchurch Sisters of Mercy the reforms meant reflecting back on the work of Catherine McAuley and asking themselves what work she would be doing in modern-day New Zealand. They took the challenge presented by Vatican II in the “Document on the Religious Life” and each community began to hold discussion groups. Pauline recalls discovering with shock that when she sat down to talk with nuns she had known for many years they were, in fact, strangers to her, as they had talked very little to one another in the depth that was now required of them.⁹⁷ These discussion groups provided an important space for the sisters to discuss the changes being asked of them. Sister Helen describes how these discussions affected the congregation and helped to shape the initial move of Pauline, Teresa and herself to Aranui:

And so we in our congregation took these messages from Rome very seriously and we started to have weekly discussion about this huge change that was being asked for and we had almost got into the habit of having a weekly meeting and going away and feeling good about it, but we started to think that something should be moved, something should be changed and when we looked at the spirit of the Gospel and the spirit of our foundress Catherine McAuley we were given very clear directions about what we should be doing as well as talking.

For the Aranui Sisters, the talk and discussion around the changes called for by Vatican II proved to be a major catalyst for their move to the East as they saw their work as embracing this call to action by working at the level of the street to help those in need. For Sister Marie, the experience of Vatican II was much the same as she recalls how,

The Second Vatican Council from 1962 to 1965 called us as religious women to look at ourselves as a community and ask whether we were being true to the spirit the ideals and the example of our foundress

⁹⁶ Sisters of Mercy Archives, “Circa mid 1980s Review For Religious,” 342.

⁹⁷ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 91.

Catherine McAuley and her associates. Also, whether we were being true to the spirit of the Gospel.⁹⁸

For religious women perhaps the most visible change that came from Vatican II was the call to adapt religious dress, beginning with the modification of the habit traditionally worn by nuns. Many orders had begun their changes to religious life by adapting their habit. The Sisters of Mercy, after two years of discussion on the subject, folded away for the last time the habit that had been designed and worn by Catherine McAuley, replacing it with a simpler habit and headdress.⁹⁹ The new habit was a radical change from the coif and gimp of the original, showcasing the hair of the sisters, which had traditionally been strictly hidden, making way for the person beneath the habit to be accepted, not just a religious sister but as a woman in modern society.¹⁰⁰ This opened the door for further changes with a move from black to lighter colours such as blue and white in summer, shorter hemlines, open shoes, fawn stockings and short sleeves, but these changes created division amongst the sisters with some embracing these changes and others remaining strongly opposed.¹⁰¹ As the Church was slowly opening itself up and allowing religious men and women to think critically about the changes brought by the Second Vatican Council to the church this created an environment foreign to many religious as they began to experience polarisation within their communities amongst those with differing opinions. Where once they had blindly obeyed the rules and regulations set before them they were now being asked to reflect and evaluate the changes occurring in their lives.

Polarisation was a new experience for many religious and it became not uncommon to hear of priests and nuns leaving their religious lives in the wake of the changes brought about by Vatican II. As Catholics began to implement new ideas, some of which were fairly distant from the traditional image of Catholicism, some people felt that this was no longer fitting to their concept of religious life.¹⁰² This polarisation can be seen in action through the discussion groups held by the Christchurch Sisters of Mercy, as the sisters got used to having their own say and voicing their own opinions. For some, this meant

⁹⁸ Sister Marie McCrea, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

⁹⁹ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 94.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 94.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 95.

¹⁰² Simmons, *A Brief History of the Catholic Church in New Zealand*, 111.

that they were viewed differently by those who did not agree with them and created a dissent amongst the sisters that had not previously existed. This would also have an effect on the Aranui Sisters as they soon learnt that not all of their fellow sisters were supportive of their new mission.

Immediately after Vatican II had closed, a new wave of lay interest and concern within the Church emerged resulting in increased participation within the Church.¹⁰³ Traditionally people had followed the rulings of the Church. As Pauline describes how during her Catholic upbringing on the West Coast during the 1930s and 1940s these rules were binding for the Catholic conscious and to break them was considered a serious sin – so serious as to make even the most law-abiding individuals agonise over accidentally breaking Friday's abstinence of meat or not being sick enough to miss Sunday mass.¹⁰⁴ The laws of the Church in the first half the twentieth century were so rigid that in Pauline's small community of Cornadun, Catholics were forbidden to enter into a Protestant Church. This meant that they could not attend the funerals or weddings of Protestant neighbours, no matter how close they were to the individual; instead, they waited outside the service before being able to join their community in expressing their grief or to join in the celebrations.¹⁰⁵ These strict rules softened after Vatican II as the Church relaxed many of these rules allowing the laity to become more involved in their parish communities as they grew to question different aspects of Church life. The move to the vernacular allowed for the laity to hear the mass in their own language, making it more accessible to the everyday people. In *A Changing Order*, Pauline recounts the first time she experienced the vernacular being used in mass. At the Villa Maria chapel in the early 1960s, Father Bernard O'Brien turned to his congregation and said: "We are now free to say the Pater Noster [the Lord's Prayer] in the Mass in English, so I shall do so this morning!" Pauline recalled feeling stunned at how in one moment a centuries' old tradition was overthrown.¹⁰⁶ The rate at which these changes were being made led to a polarisation that was emerging between those who supported and embraced them and those who

¹⁰³ O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community*, 411.

¹⁰⁴ Pauline O'Regan, *Aunts and Windmills: Stories from My Past* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1991), 164-165.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 163.

¹⁰⁶ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 89.

were opposed to what they considered the throwing away of tradition rather than adaptation.

Vatican II put in place the reform that allowed for the Aranui Sisters to move away from the Convent and engage with the community in a way that had rarely been seen since Catherine McAuley and her early sisters' work on the streets of Dublin. The Aranui Sisters took on board the requirement of the Vatican Council to return to the mission of their founder by engaging with people in need at the level of the street. Pope Paul VI wrote in 1971 that "There is an urgent need to remake at the level of the street, of the neighbourhood or of the great agglomerative dwellings the social fabric whereby man may be able to develop the needs of his personality."¹⁰⁷ This call to care for the individuals on the street that they may grow and flourish within their communities is central to the work of the Aranui Sisters who focused their early work around breaking down isolation and establishing a sense of community. The words of Pope Paul VI became a central part of the sisters' work with the North East Community Development Scheme, which used these words in forming their constitution as a reminder that their work aimed to help people at the local level to break down isolation and foster a sense of community and belonging.

Motivation for Change

For the Aranui Sisters, the changes in the Church at the time as a result of Vatican II was one of the main motivations behind their decision made on that late night in the Villa Maria kitchen. Sister Helen recalls,

Vatican II was our strongest motivation the changes made in religious life came quite gradually and we embraced them.¹⁰⁸

The impact that these changes had on the sisters is evident when Helen describes how,

The Church had always been rather enclosed and people were expected to join the Church and this radical change that came about with Pope John XXIII was saying that the Church should go to the people, the Church should be there with the people.

¹⁰⁷ Pope Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*. May 19, 1971.

¹⁰⁸ Sister Helen Goggin, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

For not only were they pushed to return to the spirit of Catherine McAuley but also to bring the Church to the people. Sister Marie, who entered the mission a few years after the initial move, describes the effect of Council in her own words saying,

I think that one of the greatest achievements of the Council was ... 'the restoration of the baptismal dignity of the laity'... It called women and men in the pews to exercise the proper role assigned to them by virtue of the sacrament of their baptism and through our baptism, we are all anointed priest, prophet and king.

For Marie, Vatican II called all individuals to action and as she describes this was an important part of their work to help people to find their calling and place within society. She says,

This theological understanding had been lost over the centuries and people had resorted to the practice of private devotion in order to nourish their spiritual lives and in general, the people left the direction and life of the Church to the clergy and I think the Second Vatican Council helped us to recognise that we are all the people of God: Priest, religious and laypeople. This theology underpinned much of our work that we were all part of the Church we were all people of God and we all have a responsibility through our baptism. So we attempted to help people to claim their rightful place in the Church and their call to love and service both within the Church and the wider community.¹⁰⁹

A Plan with Good Intentions

The sisters had a very simple goal in mind when making the move to Aranui. In their first days in Aranui, they endeavoured to just "be there" and "listen", with one simple goal "to be good neighbours and to do everything [they] could to build up neighbourliness..."¹¹⁰ What they hoped to achieve was very simple but it was this simple goal that allowed them to slowly build up relationships with their neighbours which was the first step in creating community. Helen reflected that,

I suppose we wanted to fit. We didn't want to stand out in any way, we wanted to be accepted, we wanted to make friends and we wanted to learn. We wanted to learn the truth about living in the suburb[s], like Aranui.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Sister Marie McCrea, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

¹¹⁰ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Overview of North East Community Development Scheme 1979-95 by Tony McChon*, 2018.15.12.; O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 1.

¹¹¹ Sister Helen Goggin, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

For Marie who joined the mission later in 1977, the goal was much the same,

We wanted to identify closely with the people amongst whom we lived and to attempt to be good neighbours.¹¹²

The importance of being accepted was key to their early work as without earning the trust and respect of their neighbours they could not hope to build trust amongst the community. The sisters hoped to be able to meet the needs within the community such as those of young mothers who were in desperate need of older women to talk to.¹¹³ They aimed to be people that others in the community could come, to talk and have their problems heard. What they found was that there was “really only one problem, loneliness, and all the other problems stemmed from that.”¹¹⁴

At the same time as the Aranui Sisters were preparing to conduct their mission, the Christchurch Sisters of Mercy felt they had been called to meet the needs of the Church through acquiring knowledge of the social conditions of modern times. Catherine McAuley who the sisters still looked to as their founders for inspiration, called the Sisters of Mercy to respond to the needs of the modern-day. To carry on her charism of mercy meant drawing inspiration from “suffering man” in the same way Catherine McAuley had done back on the streets of Dublin.¹¹⁵ The Sisters of Mercy in Christchurch reflected on these issues and in the mid-1970s as the Aranui mission was getting underway they came to realise that there was a need for them to work with the family unit and to go where laypeople were not free to go, meeting the greatest needs. Through this, the sisters hoped to “reveal to the people we care for, and with whom we work, the reality of Gods compassionate love.”¹¹⁶ In an address to the Order, Sister Rosaline Superior of the Christchurch Congregation wrote,

This is the message of the Gospel as lived in the life of Jesus and His apostolate. He identified Himself with the poor and those little cared for by the rest of society. This covered the whole spectrum of colour, class,

¹¹² Sister Marie McCrea, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

¹¹³ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Neighbourhood Groups - North East Christchurch Parish - Includes Material on Building Parish Groups*, 2018.15.23.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Sisters of Mercy Aranui and Parklands 1975-1976*.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

and race. It made no difference to Christ. He saw a need in a person and met it.¹¹⁷

It was from this doctrine that the Aranui Sisters were beginning their mission. The ideas of identifying with the poor and working where the need was greatest were key factors in their mission to establish a community within the suburb of Aranui. This came at a time when the Church was coming to realise, as a result of Vatican II, that the Catholic Church had become isolated from the world outside its Parish walls.¹¹⁸

The Mission Grows

When the sisters expanded their mission work into Burwood and Parklands in 1977, they went a step further than simply building up a sense of community, moving into community development. As they involved members of the North East Parish and others from the wider community, this mission work came to be called the North East Community Development Scheme from 1987. The scheme was established as a way to develop the mission and bring other members of the community into their work. The scheme's aims according to its constitution was to reach out to the people on the streets regardless of denomination and to bring them together as a community. To do this it aimed to bring people together into small groups where relationships could be fostered and to encourage people to use their own skills and resources to meet their own needs.¹¹⁹ The scheme sought to continue the work carried out by the sisters in Aranui through breaking down the isolation experienced by people living in the suburbs and building up friendships with their neighbours.¹²⁰ This was outlined in its constitution which stated, "Centres of special interest and of culture must be created or developed at the community and parish levels with different forms of associations, recreational centres and spiritual gatherings where the individual can escape from isolation and form a new deep personal relationship."¹²¹ The goal was achieved through establishing small groups in

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Neighbourhood Groups - North East Christchurch Parish - Includes Material on Building Parish Groups*, 2018.15.23.

¹¹⁹ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Constitution and Certificate of Incorporation of North East Community Development Scheme*, 2018.15.1.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Constitution and Certificate of Incorporation of North East Community Development Scheme*, 2018.15.1.

which people could come together meet new people and socialise such as coffee groups, reading groups and the running of various courses. The NECDS aimed to form a community-based church that could reach out beyond the confines of the parish through these small social groups to positively impact on the lives of those at the level of the street.¹²²

In contrast to most early mission work in New Zealand, through their work in the community, the sisters did not hope to gain a religious response in exchange for their help and support.¹²³ They did not go out to convert people to Catholicism and never restricted their work to any one denomination, preferring to help those of any or even no denomination. In the words of Sister Teresa, the Aranui Sisters did not “come to convert people but to be good neighbours and make life more human if we could.”¹²⁴ For the sisters, their mission was more than just preaching the Gospel, but about living Gospel values and helping anyone in need the sisters felt that “there are more ways of doing this than preaching to those who come to church on Sundays. One way, we feel, is to join people in their struggle and to be beside them when they need help.”¹²⁵ In the NECDS, they asked themselves “Are we watching and listening to what the Holy Spirit is doing in the world, rather than just in our churches?”¹²⁶ This questioning of their motives and actions helped the mission to grow and reach out to those who needed help in the community by not limiting their work to within the confines of Sunday mass.

The Aranui mission was, therefore, a product of the many changes that had occurred in the Catholic Church as a result of Vatican II. The work of Catherine McAuley was a direct inspiration showing that it was possible to live and work amongst the poor and vulnerable. The Aranui Sisters sought to return to this method of mission work carrying on the work of Catherine McAuley, taking inspiration from her life and applying her methods

¹²² Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Overview of Activities (Includes Correspondence, Leaflets and Newspaper Articles)*, 2018.15.15.

¹²³ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Overview of North East Community Development Scheme 1979-95 by Tony McChon*, 2018.15.12.

¹²⁴ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Neighbourhood Groups - North East Christchurch Parish - Includes Material on Building Parish Groups*, 2018.15.23.

¹²⁵ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Annual Reports*, 2018.15.13.

¹²⁶ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Overview of North East Community Development Scheme 1979-95 by Tony McChon*, 2018.15.12.

to modern-day New Zealand. In doing so ,the sisters hoped that through their work they could alleviate some of the issues faced by those living in the suburbs, which stemmed from loneliness and a lack of trust.

Chapter Two

From Convent to Community

In February 1973 Sisters Helen, Pauline and Teresa arrived in the statehouse that was to become their home and the centre of their mission in Aranui. Standing in the front room of their new home, the sisters decided to mark the occasion with a prayer to bless their mission. As they reached out their hands and lowered their heads to pray they felt something crawling up their legs and looked down to see thousands of fleas. After overcoming the initial shock, the three Sisters ran outside swatting at their legs trying desperately to shake them off, falling into a laughing heap on the front lawn.¹²⁷

The sisters may not have finished that first prayer but their new mission began in the way it would continue, with a realisation that life in the suburbs would not be easy and that it would differ greatly from the life they had known in the convent.

The work undertaken by the sisters in Aranui focused on breaking down the social isolation they saw in the suburbs and worked to build up a sense of community by establishing relationships between neighbours. This chapter will explore the early days of the sisters' mission and how they began to break down the barriers of isolation. It will also demonstrate how the sisters' work highlights the many issues faced by women throughout New Zealand living in the suburbs as many young women became trapped in the suburbs with limited forms of support. This often led to women suffering from what scholars such as Sue Kedgley have referred to as "suburban neurosis". Dealing with these issues formed an important part of the sisters' mission as they worked to support women living in the suburbs, with particular attention given to solo mothers.

The Sisters Make the Move

In August 1971 the sisters wrote a letter to the congregation asking to move to a closely built-up area, such as Aranui, where the "urban environment creates problems for young married women and young people who are in need of guidance and support." They hoped to be witness to the joys of everyday life in the community and to provide support

¹²⁷ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 1.

for those in need, regardless of their religious beliefs.¹²⁸ The work the Aranui Sisters hoped to undertake closely resembled a return to the work of Catherine McAuley and her original group of nuns, who identified closely with the poor and vulnerable on the streets of Dublin and caused significant controversy. The Aranui Sisters had asked themselves what would Catherine McAuley be doing if she lived in twentieth-century New Zealand, what people would she identify with, how would she live and what would she be saying to them and their fellow Sisters of Mercy as her followers?¹²⁹ Together the sisters proposed a date for the move of January 1973, giving them enough time to prepare themselves for the work to come. The year prior to their move was a year of preparation for the Aranui Sisters as they tried to ready themselves in any possible way they could. They met with people who had long associations with Aranui, people in “caring” professions, the M.P. for the Avon electorate Mr Jock Mathison and the Housing Corporation.¹³⁰ The sisters also approached the Housing Corporation of New Zealand originally hoping to live in a house on the notorious Hampshire Street, which was known for its youth gangs and violence.¹³¹ However, the Housing Corporation recommend the sisters take a statehouse on Porchester Street and to wait until they had established themselves in the community before making the move to Hampshire Street.¹³²

Despite some initial hesitation from within the Congregation, the move to Aranui was given the full support of the Christchurch Sisters of Mercy. In their community letter to the Congregation in March 1973, the Aranui Sisters wrote, “We were greatly strengthened by the presence of so many Sisters at the beautiful Mass at St Mary’s. We really felt “sent forth” by you all that evening and we are deeply grateful to belong to such a wonderful family.”¹³³ This warm send-off must have been particularly special for the three Sisters, as initial hesitation about their move had caused some tension within the Congregation. Sister Helen recalled that,

¹²⁸ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

¹²⁹ Pauline O’Regan and Teresa O’Connor, *Community Give It A Go!* (Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1989), 14-17.

¹³⁰ O’Regan, *A Changing Order*, 106.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Sisters of Mercy Archive, “Community Letter March, 1973.”

At first, we sensed not a very great support and there was a strong feeling that we were letting down the boat in some way. Some Sisters were openly opposed to our move even after the official approval was given and we felt that quite strongly. Some of the problem was of our own making, of course, a certain difficulty in conversation, but we were still a very tightly knit group of women.

She went on to say,

Some were strongly in support of us, but I'd say that the majority were questioning it and it took a little while and it happened in the end. In the end, it was supportive and of course, it became quite proud of what we were doing and the sisters gradually came to accept us, but it wasn't an easy time.¹³⁴

An important aspect of the sisters' move to Aranui was becoming self-sufficient. This was an important part of their way of life in the community. They wanted to live like those they hoped to serve within the community and this meant living on what they earned themselves. By sharing their neighbours' lifestyle and work, the sisters were able to build up people's confidence in themselves enabling them to effect change in their own situations.¹³⁵ Being self-sufficient also allowed the sisters to be independent of the Church and the Congregation, as they were not relying on anyone outside their small community for funding. This meant the sisters could work at their own pace with no imposed deadlines or incentives to meet. By living a self-supporting lifestyle, the sisters were able to identify with the struggles of the working-class living in Aranui.¹³⁶ The sisters said in their evaluation of the mission in 1975,

We considered it important, therefore, to live with the poor, sharing their environment and standard of living so that they can see the purpose of our lives and we hope to be a witness to joy, to poverty, positively lived and accepted, to community and to love.¹³⁷

Sister Helen recalled how they

¹³⁴ Sister Helen Goggin, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

¹³⁵ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Neighbourhood Groups - North East Christchurch Parish - Includes Material on Building Parish Groups*, 2018.15.23.

¹³⁶ Sisters of Mercy Archive, "Helen, 1984."

¹³⁷ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Evaluation of North East Community Development Scheme (Sisters of Mercy) Experimental Community*, 2018.15.19.

Didn't want to stand out in any way, we wanted to be accepted, we wanted to make friends and we wanted to learn. We wanted to learn the truth about living in the suburbs like Aranui.¹³⁸

For them this meant living in the same conditions as those they were trying help, living in a statehouse and working for their income. The idea of self-sufficiency while unique in the early 1970s was not entirely new. The idea of self-sufficiency goes back to Saint Paul who earned his own living, being financially independent of the local Church and allowing what money he did earn to go back into the local community.¹³⁹ The sisters followed this model, which gave them greater independence to respond to community needs and allowed them to use any surplus funds to support other causes in the community such as women's refuge.¹⁴⁰

In order to be self-sufficient, the sisters appointed one member from their community as the "breadwinner". The first community member to take on this role was Sister Pauline, who joined the staff at Aranui High School as a history teacher. In *A Changing Order*, she recalls walking into the classroom feeling insecure and self-conscious without the protection of her habit and veil.¹⁴¹ However, Pauline was able to establish herself as a respected figure in the school community becoming involved in the school Christian group's Tuesday morning prayer and lunchtime meetings.¹⁴² Pauline was asked to become an official advisor for the Inter-School Christian Fellowship and ran C.C.D. classes out of their home for Catholic children at Aranui and Avonside Girls' High School.¹⁴³ In her second year teaching at Aranui, Pauline was offered the position of guidance teacher, which allowed her to offer one-to-one sessions for students and to carry out home visits to provide support and counselling to parents.¹⁴⁴ The response of

¹³⁸ Sister Helen Goggin, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

¹³⁹ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

¹⁴⁰ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Evaluation of North East Community Development Scheme (Sisters of Mercy) Experimental Community*, 2018.15.19.

¹⁴¹ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 27.

¹⁴² Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Evaluation of North East Community Development Scheme (Sisters of Mercy) Experimental Community*, 2018.15.19.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Annual Reports*, 2018.15.13.

the students was positive as Pauline recalled, “They all know I am a nun, but it doesn’t seem to make any difference.”¹⁴⁵

The move to Aranui was a well-planned and thought out transition. The sisters went into their new mission having prepared themselves in any way they could. Despite initial hesitation from some within the Congregation and parents within the local Catholic community, the sisters made a successful transition into their new self-sufficient lifestyle in the small statehouse in Porchester Street. Bishop Ashby expressed his support for the sisters by publicly endorsing the move to Aranui at the Villa Maria and St Mary’s prize givings saying, “I welcome the experiment to be tried by the sisters ... I believe it will bring great blessings on the diocese, the district of Aranui and on the sisters...”¹⁴⁶ As many parents in the audience were still strongly opposed to the move Bishop Ashby’s endorsement was particularly significant. Many of the parents felt that the Sister’s primary duty was in educating young Catholics and by moving away from their role as educators they were abandoning their place within the Catholic community.¹⁴⁷ This was a particularly strong criticism as when the Aranui mission began in 1973 Catholic schools had not yet become state-integrated meaning religious women were still an important part of the running of Catholic schools. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it was not until 1975 when the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act was introduced that Catholic schools were given state funding to allow more lay teachers to be appointed. Additionally, the three Sisters had been long-standing members of the school community having each taught at Villa Maria for just over fifteen years. Each of these women had also held leadership positions, such as Superior and Boarders Mistress with Pauline and Teresa having both spent time as principal, they were valued members of the College and many parents were reluctant to see them leave.

The Issue of Loneliness

Aranui at the time had relatively high numbers of men and women on benefits compared with other neighbouring suburbs. By 1986, Aranui had the highest number of women on

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 106.

¹⁴⁷ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Annual Reports*, 2018.15.13.

the Domestic Purposes Benefit compared to the rest of Christchurch City.¹⁴⁸ Aranui also had low levels of female education when compared to other suburbs in the east, such as Burwood, and male education was also low in comparison. The number of divorced and separated women was also comparatively high and increased from 75 divorced women to 147 between 1976 and 1986 (see Appendix 1). Aranui was a suburb in which women were often facing hardships, trying to raise their children on the benefit while also going through divorce proceedings. On the sisters' street were families where solo mothers such as "Vi" and "Maureen" had left alcoholic husbands and were trying to make ends meet in order to raise their four children. Several other families, such as "Pepi and Tony," "Kath and Ben" or "Shirley and Mick", maintained unhappy and sometimes violent marriages (see Appendix 2). The sisters observed that many of these families kept to themselves and rarely sought help outside their own homes.

The sisters saw a need to build up a sense of community, which motivated them to make the move to Aranui. They defined community as having "to do with people living in the same locality and having a good connection with one another. It has to do with the belief that the individual does not grow in isolation."¹⁴⁹ As introduced in chapter one, one of the main issues the sisters saw in the suburbs was loneliness. Sister Helen recalled, "Many young women experience dreadful loneliness and often feel keenly the lack of an older woman to talk to."¹⁵⁰ In a speech given at Woodville, a small town east of Palmerston North, in June 1982 the sisters spoke of the need in the community:

"We had heard that often family problems could be solved if only the young lonely mother had an older woman to listen to her. We could do that we were old and we could listen."¹⁵¹

The sisters felt that they were old and they could talk so surely they could help break down the barriers of isolation and to help women in need. They found that many women never left their houses choosing to cling to the security of their homes, with many not

¹⁴⁸ Census of Population and Dwellings 1986, *Series B Report 19*, Table 12: 70.

¹⁴⁹ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

¹⁵⁰ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Annual Reports*, 2018.15.13.

¹⁵¹ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

knowing their neighbours whom they often distrusted.¹⁵² In their evaluation of their first years in Aranui, the sisters wrote that they intended to help: “young women especially, to attain a better quality of life within their often very restricted spheres.”¹⁵³ Therefore, this early work was about engaging people in conversation, introducing them to neighbours and establishing networks of communication and support in what they perceived as a very isolated and lonely area.

When asked what the biggest challenge to their early work in Aranui was Sister Helen recalled that it,

Would have to be discarding any preconceived ideas that we had, fed by the media mostly, about the people in Aranui trouble makers, the police were always there, that was the general attitude that was held at the time and so we had to have an open mind about it. We wanted to meet people at their level and that might have been just walking along the street, or at the clothesline, or just wherever we met at the shopping centre... But I think that the biggest challenge was going with an open mind.¹⁵⁴

The clothesline became an import point of contact between the sisters and the local people. In the early months of their mission, Teresa and Helen would find any way they could to engage people in conversation, on the street, at the shops or the bus stop, taking whatever opportunities they could to talk to the local people and to find out what they considered to be the greatest needs of the community.¹⁵⁵ They quickly came to realise when they hung their washing out and spoke to people as they walked past they would often stop and have a conversation. They came to the conclusion that the image of a woman hanging out her washing was an unthreatening one and people felt comfortable stopping to have a chat when they hung their laundry on the clothesline out front of their home. When the sisters realised the importance of the clothesline as a point of contact they began to hang out a large wash each day, changing sheets, washing towels and almost ruining their winter woollies from the constant washing.¹⁵⁶ Pauline said, “In the

¹⁵² Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Annual Reports*, 2018.15.13.

¹⁵³ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Evaluation of North East Community Development Scheme (Sisters of Mercy) Experimental Community*, 2018.15.19.

¹⁵⁴ Sister Helen Goggin, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

¹⁵⁵ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

¹⁵⁶ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 3.



Figure 3: From Right: Sister Helen, Sister Teresa and Sister Pauline socialise in their garden with friends in the 1970s. (Source: “Communes and communities - Religious and spiritual communities,” *Te Ara - The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*. Accessed October 28, 2019).

early days we did far more washing than we needed to but we also made friends.”¹⁵⁷ The clothesline became such an important feature of their home that in their letter to the Congregation the sisters wrote that when two girls from Hokitika came to visit them they “went down the street looking at the washing on the clothesline to determine which house was ours!”¹⁵⁸ The sisters’ clothesline was never empty and it was used as a steppingstone to inviting people into their home for a cup of tea.¹⁵⁹ The concept of providing a “good cup of tea” is a return to the values of their founder Catherine McAuley as on her deathbed she called for her Sisters to share in a cup of tea to comfort each other. Catherine believed that the simple act of sharing in a cup of tea could bring comfort

¹⁵⁷ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Neighbourhood Groups - North East Christchurch Parish - Includes Material on Building Parish Groups*, 2018.15.23.

¹⁵⁸ Sisters of Mercy Archive, “Community Letter Easter 1973.”

¹⁵⁹ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 3.

and warm the spirit.¹⁶⁰ Conversation was, therefore, a key part to the sisters' ministry. In an interview with the *Christchurch Mail* in 2017, Sister Helen recalled that in the early days they "spent more time outside than inside, we entered into conversation whenever we could."¹⁶¹

The sisters considered that the community responded well to the work they were doing in the neighbourhood. In an early letter to the Congregation written in March 1973, the Aranui Sisters described the warm response they received from the people of Aranui (see Figure 3). They wrote:

The people of Aranui have given us a welcome that has warmed our hearts and there has hardly been a moment when someone has not been in. We can hardly believe that you could meet so many people and make so many friends in only two weeks. The people are poor but they are open-hearted and friendly and very happy to have 'the sisters' living in their midst.¹⁶²

Evidence of the support the community gave to the sisters' work can be found in the words of one resident the sisters visited. He had just come out of hospital and said of their work, "I was very surprised to find out they were nuns because they came to visit more as friends. They didn't mention religion once."¹⁶³ This response also demonstrates, the cross-denominational aspect of the sisters mentioned in chapter one. The sisters made the conscious decision to help anyone in need, rather than restricting themselves by only helping people of a Catholic faith.

The Work Begins

The early work carried out in Aranui by the sisters was centred on working alongside local women. Their work naturally came to focus on women, as it was not often that they would meet the men in the community, it was more common for women to be at home all day.¹⁶⁴ The day to day work carried out by Teresa and Helen was therefore focused around

¹⁶⁰ Sullivan, *The Path of Mercy*, 362.

¹⁶¹ Anna Price, "Speaking out for Justice and the Needy," *Christchurch Mail*, June 22, 2017.

¹⁶² Sisters of Mercy Archive, "Community Letter March, 1973."

¹⁶³ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Annual Reports*, 2018.15.13.

¹⁶⁴ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 4.

facilitating these new relationships within the community,¹⁶⁵ they conducted home visits, individual counselling and simply listened and provided support to anyone in need.¹⁶⁶ At the same time, Sister Pauline was also making an impact through her work at Aranui High School with Father O'Connor writing in their 1975 Evaluation "Reports from Aranui High School indicated that the Sister teaching there was making no small impact on staff and numbers of the pupils."¹⁶⁷

Events such as the nationwide discussion programme, Community '73, provided the sisters with useful resources, which they used to help engage the community. They found that because people were sharing news of the programme on TV and radio it appeared more formalised than a locally organised group and more people were willing to join.¹⁶⁸ The programme allowed for the formation of small discussion groups amongst the families living on their street and at the request of the participants, they ended the programme with a barbecue picnic at Spencer Park.¹⁶⁹ The programme was an overall success with the sisters running their own Community '74 programme the following year at the request of local residents. The programmes initiated a sense of neighbourhood and was used as a means to introduce families who had often been living on the same street for years without getting to know each other.¹⁷⁰ The sisters also became involved in a series of pre-existing community groups, bringing people together in small groups and initiating a series of activities in the community. Teresa and Helen were involved in a scheme that provided two hours of reading to children each morning during the school holidays. They also took part in an initiative led by some local women who lobbied the Traffic Department to put a white line down the centre of Hampshire Street outside the

¹⁶⁵ In order to break down the isolation and establish relationships amongst neighbours the sisters began to see the importance of having a facilitator to bring people together. In *Community Give It A GO!* Teresa and Pauline wrote about how although they were not familiar with the term at the time but they came to understand and respect the concept of being a "facilitator."

¹⁶⁶ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

¹⁶⁷ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Evaluation of the Sisters of Mercy Experimental Community Aranui 1975*, 42.

¹⁶⁸ O'Regan, and O'Connor, *Community Give It A Go!*, 19.

¹⁶⁹ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

¹⁷⁰ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Evaluation of North East Community Development Scheme (Sisters of Mercy) Experimental Community*, 2018.15.19.

shops and “no parking” lines on the corners.¹⁷¹ They were also strongly enmeshed in the local Catholic parish, acting as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion,¹⁷² as well as taking communion to the sick and elderly in the parish community.¹⁷³

Telephone ministry became an important part of their work. The sisters spent a considerable amount of time each day answering phone calls from people in need. Often those who rang were lonely or in some sort of crisis such as a woman, facing domestic abuse or a man whose wife had taken an overdose of pills. They acted as a sounding board for people facing difficult decisions or people trying to get above their depression.¹⁷⁴ The sisters used their telephone ministry as a way to always be available to those in need, to provide advice or simply to listen.

As their work within the community became known, increasing numbers of women came to the Sisters for support and guidance. In their community letter for December 1973 just a year into their mission the sisters wrote, “Last week a woman knocked on our door at 10:30 PM to ask Sister Teresa to come and for the next two hours she and her husband talked over with Sister how they could retrieve an almost broken marriage.”¹⁷⁵ Within a year the sisters had established themselves as a pillar of support within the community that individuals felt comfortable turning to in their hour of need. In that same letter, the sisters also wrote that “Many of them, living almost side by side, had never met before. It gave us great encouragement when one man said, ‘This Street is a different place since you came to live here’.”¹⁷⁶

In 1975, the Sisters decided it was time for them to extend their work by moving to Hampshire Street, where they had intended to live when they initially moved to Aranui. However, the sisters had been advised against moving straight to Hampshire Street due

¹⁷¹ Sisters of Mercy Archive, “Community Letter, September 1975.”

¹⁷² An Extraordinary Minister is the title given to a layperson who assists the Priest in administering the Eucharist after it has been consecrated by the Parish Priest.

¹⁷³ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Evaluation of North East Community Development Scheme (Sisters of Mercy) Experimental Community*, 2018.15.19, 13.

¹⁷⁴ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Evaluation of North East Community Development Scheme (Sisters of Mercy) Experimental Community*, 2018.15.19, 17-18.

¹⁷⁵ Sisters of Mercy Archive, “Community Letter December, 1973.”

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

to its reputation for violence.¹⁷⁷ In their Community letter to the Congregation in September 1975, they wrote that “The needs here are if anything more pressing than at Porchester Street.”¹⁷⁸ From their new home in Hampshire Street, the sisters were able to continue their work begun on Porchester Street to help the community.

A Woman's Issue

Before the Sister's arrival in Aranui, they had a general idea that women needed to be liberated but had limited engagement with the feminist movement. Sister Pauline wrote that they could hardly have been called feminists as, “We had not read feminist literature until 1973, but when we did we found that it matched our experience.”¹⁷⁹ The Sister's noticed early into their mission that many of the women in Aranui were facing similar issues to women in suburbs around New Zealand during the 1970s. Women at the time were expected to marry and give up any form of work or career they may have had in order to become life-long mothers. Motherhood was considered to be a vocation where a woman's sole focus should be the needs of her children. However, the child-rearing stage of women's lives was shrinking as they were having fewer children.¹⁸⁰ While women had previously had large families requiring mothers to be breast-feeding and caring for young babies for most of their lives, they were now choosing to have smaller families of between two and four children, which required much less child-rearing than what had been required of the generations of women before them. This was in part due to the increasing use and availability of contraception through the introduction of the pill in 1962, which meant that women had greater control over their fertility.¹⁸¹

According to Kedgley, many women felt they were unable to turn to their own mothers for advice as the generational gap between them saw conflicting ideas over how to raise their children. Expert advice failed to alleviate this issue as experts often contradicted each other causing distress for many women who did not know who to trust for advice.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 17.

¹⁷⁸ Sisters of Mercy Archive, “Community Letter, September 1975.”

¹⁷⁹ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 12.

¹⁸⁰ Kedgley, *Mum's the Word*, 15.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 207.

Many of these women ended up living in the suburbs, often away from family. This led to issues like loneliness, as women were often left at home all day with no one but a toddler to talk to while their husbands were at work. The suburbs heightened these feelings as with limited public transport systems and few amenities within walking distance, there was little option but to stay at home with their children. Many women fell into states of depression some unable to motivate themselves to even answer the door or do their housework. This social phenomenon has been described by a number of feminist scholars such as Sue Kedgley as “suburban neurosis” or Joyce Herd as “suburban cabbages”. These scholars have built off the work of Margot Roth who in her 1959 article argued that domesticity had been thrust unwillingly upon women limiting their opportunities for further education.¹⁸³ Often the only response given by male doctors who did not know how to deal with these women was to prescribe them with drugs, which often only resulted in women becoming addicted to barbiturates, sleeping pills or tranquillisers.¹⁸⁴ The sisters worked closely with women in Aranui to provide them with the support and care needed to combat the issue of suburban neurosis, as will be seen in chapter three. In some cases, they dealt directly with doctors to try to prevent them from medicating women and to deal with the issue instead. As the sisters engaged with feminist literature, they came to understand the troubles facing suburban women more clearly and focused much of their work around liberating women in the community providing them with the skills and confidence to venture outside their homes. For example, one woman the sisters helped was from Latin-America, although, she had been living in Aranui for some time she felt very lonely as she spoke limited English and her children were growing up. The sisters helped her by connecting her with a woman who spoke Spanish and they began weekly English lessons together. The woman grew in confidence as her English improved and began to leave the house on her own. For the sisters, this seemed like an almost perfect success story until they realised that her husband was not pleased with his wife’s newfound confidence. They quickly realised he preferred that his wife remain safely behind closed doors “like a beautiful possession.”¹⁸⁵

Part of the issue was that many women resented being condemned to life as a “suburban cabbage” as women were more highly educated than their mothers and grandmothers

¹⁸³ Margot Roth, “Housewives or Human Beings?” 6-7.

¹⁸⁴ Kedgley, *Mum’s the Word*, 220.

¹⁸⁵ O’Regan, *A Changing Order*, 13.

before them and felt as though their education and skills were being wasted.¹⁸⁶ These educated women were struggling to cope as mothers because motherhood often came as a shock. As it became more common for women to move away from their families for their own work opportunities or those of their husbands, they often had very limited interaction with babies and toddlers before becoming mothers themselves.¹⁸⁷ These women were expected to simply cope with the drastic changes that came with becoming a mother. As Robin McKinlay observed in her 1983 thesis, the assumptions that women should cope - and that if a woman is not coping she is somehow a failure of her own making - was one of the strongest prevailing ideas about motherhood at that time.¹⁸⁸ She also argues that prior to the 1970s motherhood was not studied as part of the women's experiences but as part of family life or the needs of children.¹⁸⁹ The Aranui Sisters recognised this issue that was affecting many of the women in their community. In *Community Give It A Go!* Pauline and Teresa recognised that "Many women, before the birth of their first child, are in well-paid employment and make a substantial contribution to the finances of the home. When they "stop working," they are often acutely aware that they are no longer "contributing" to the family income. They then tend to see their housework and their childminding as being the contribution they now make in place of their weekly pay."¹⁹⁰

Although it is absent in the primary source material it can be inferred from the sisters' actions that they took a pragmatic approach to topics such as divorce, contraception and abortion. The sisters supported women such as Kathy, as seen in chapter three, through divorce proceedings and gave their support to the Women's Self Centre which developed out of the 1977 Women's Convention providing help for solo mothers, and mental health support for women. The centre worked to provide women with a place they could come to for advice and support and took a more liberal approach to such topics. The sisters' work shows how they provided women with the opportunity to make their own choices and support them through their decisions. In a letter to Bishop Brian Ashby, Sister Teresa

¹⁸⁶ Herd, *Cracks in the Glass Ceiling*, 33.

¹⁸⁷ Philips, *The Mother Manual*, 7.

¹⁸⁸ Robin Margaret McKinlay, "Where Would We Be without Them? Motherhood and Self-Definition in New Zealand," (PhD, Victoria University of Wellington, 1983), 355.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹⁹⁰ O'Regan and O'Connor, *Community Give It A Go!*, 56.

wrote that women at the women's convention wanted the right to make their own choices about issues such as abortion. Bishop Ashby responded to the letter stating the Churches stance that "the woman alone does not have the right over the new life living in her womb" and that the sisters need to ensure that they uphold the reputation of the whole Mercy Order through their work and actions.¹⁹¹

"The Solos"

Solo mothers made up a significant part of the Aranui community, with the highest number of women on the Domestic Purposes Benefit in Christchurch City equal only to Linwood and high numbers of women on both the Domestic Purposes Benefit and Family Benefit (see Appendix 1).¹⁹² On the sisters' street alone approximately one-third of the households were home to single mothers (see Appendix 2). As a result, single mothers formed an important part of the sisters' ministry. Sister Teresa, in particular, focused much of her early community work around solo mothers forming a solo mothers' group to provide valuable support to mothers through organised discussion.¹⁹³ They found that the people who understood the problems faced by solo mothers best were often solo mothers themselves, providing them with a space in which they could come together, discuss their issues, and provide support for each other.¹⁹⁴ The depression and mental health issues affecting young mothers and particularly solo mothers could leave them unable to provide the proper care and interest in their children.¹⁹⁵ These women were a vulnerable part of society who often had little to no outside support meaning the establishment of these support networks were important to the wellbeing of many solo mothers. According to the sisters, these women often faced "isolation, rejection, and a terrible sense of failure, often accompanied by a very real poverty..."¹⁹⁶ The sisters took

¹⁹¹ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Sisters of Mercy Aranui and Parklands 1977-1979*.

¹⁹² 1976 Census of Population and Dwellings, *Incomes and Social Security Benefits*, Table 11, 110.

¹⁹³ Sisters of Mercy Archive, "Community Letter, September 1974."

¹⁹⁴ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Evaluation of North East Community Development Scheme (Sisters of Mercy) Experimental Community*, 2018.15.19, 10.

¹⁹⁵ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Evaluation of North East Community Development Scheme (Sisters of Mercy) Experimental Community*, 2018.15.19.

¹⁹⁶ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Evaluation of North East Community Development Scheme (Sisters of Mercy) Experimental Community*, 2018.15.19, 10.

on the role of supporting many of these women through difficult times. For example, Sister Teresa escorted one solo mother to the domestic court.¹⁹⁷ The sisters were struck by how alienating society was for the solo parent as everything in New Zealand society at that time was geared towards the nuclear families and heterosexual couples. Indeed, many did not find it socially acceptable for a single mother to interact with married couples, adding a further layer of isolation and stigma, which isolated many women.¹⁹⁸ The sisters became advocates for solo mothers and in 1977, they “protested vehemently against the drastic reduction of the domestic purposes benefit, whereby parents bringing up a family on their own had their benefits cut to less than half the current lowest wage.”¹⁹⁹ Solo mothers were scapegoated as “bludgers” on society and people who were “living off the taxpayer” but the sisters came to believe that these women were hardworking women, who often faced unnecessary hardship.²⁰⁰

Much of this hardship and alienation stemmed from wider social issues and government policies. After the Second World War successive governments saw the prosperity of the family unit as an investment in the future economic growth and defence of the country, they aimed to foster healthy nuclear families with stay at home mothers and breadwinning fathers.²⁰¹ The idea of the nuclear family continued to flourish through to the 1960s and under Muldoon’s National Government single-income, families were granted tax rebates as an economic incentive designed to bolster the nuclear family.²⁰²

The Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) was established in 1973, giving single mothers a weekly allowance with which to raise their children. It was introduced as the number of families without a male breadwinner were increasing due to a higher rate of divorce and births outside of marriage.²⁰³ To qualify for the DPB women had to apply for maintenance from the father of the child. This meant lengthy and often humiliating court proceedings,

¹⁹⁷ Sisters of Mercy Archive, “Community Letter Easter, 1973.”

¹⁹⁸ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 7-8.

¹⁹⁹ O'Regan and O'Connor, *Community Give It A Go!*, 19.

²⁰⁰ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, “*Aranui - an Experience of Community Development*” November 2004, 2018.15.27.i.

²⁰¹ Carlyon and Morrow, *Changing Times: New Zealand Since 1945*, 72.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 187.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 235.

which notably the father did not need to attend, as mothers had to describe the most intimate parts of their relationships and endure accusations of promiscuity from lawyers.²⁰⁴ Some women chose to bring their children up on their own using an Emergency Benefit rather than face the humiliation of paternity suits and maintenance court proceedings.²⁰⁵ Other women chose to stay in unhappy and sometimes even abusive relationships longer than necessary, as they feared they would not be able to support themselves or their children if they left their breadwinner husbands. Katherine Saville-Smith argued in her work “Women and the State” that the DPB posed a problem for governments in that women were viewed as dependent on the wages of a male breadwinner, but at the same time provided these women with an alternative to that arrangement. By providing single mothers with a form of income, the government was able to release some of the pressure calling for the provision of adequate childcare facilities, which would have enabled solo mothers to enter the workforce and support their children on their own earnings.²⁰⁶

In 1976, the Muldoon government set up a review of the DPB to investigate the rise in benefit applications. There was fear that the DPB was encouraging women to leave marriages that would otherwise be saved. The committee concluded that children were better off in two-parent households and set about introducing a series of measures making it harder for women to access the DPB.²⁰⁷ People were encouraged to report on single mothers receiving the DPB who might have men living with them. Sister Pauline recalled the traumatic effect this had on women who lived in fear, not letting any man cross their threshold in case a neighbour misinterpret their motives.²⁰⁸ On a street that was home to fourteen single mothers, the level of trust in the local community disappeared almost overnight.²⁰⁹ Single mothers began to distrust their neighbours, worrying they might be reported and lose their benefit. The distrust became so severe that a trusted visiting male teacher from the local school, who had been working in Aranui

²⁰⁴ Kedgley, *Mum's the Word*, 273.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Katherine Saville-Smith, “Women and the State,” in *Public & Private Worlds: Women in Contemporary New Zealand*, ed. Shelagh Cox (Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 202.

²⁰⁷ Kedgley, *Mum's the Word*, 276.

²⁰⁸ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 10.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

for over twelve years, was no longer being invited into people's homes. Instead, mothers were asking him if they could talk at the gate because they worried that their neighbours might be watching.²¹⁰

The main focus of the sisters' mission was to alleviate the social issues that were affecting those living in the suburbs. Loneliness was the main issue the sisters found in the suburb as it led to people feeling isolated in their own communities. This particularly affected women who were often home alone all day with only their children for company resulting in a number of women suffering from suburban neurosis. Isolation was particularly prevalent amongst solo mothers, with whom the sisters worked to establish support groups where they could come together to discuss the issues they were facing. Much of this early work helped to bring the community closer together by developing relationships and connecting people.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 11.

Chapter Three

A Strong Sense of Mission

“For the past two years we have been praying and reflecting our way through what has now become a very clear call in our lives. We feel impelled, as a group, to commit ourselves to the working class. We want to do this in a single-minded way, so that we not only identify with the poor and powerless, but are seen to do as in an unmistakable way. At the moment we are just at the beginning. If we can give ourselves completely to this life of faith then we believe that we will be dedicated to walk the pathway of the poor more and more authentically.”²¹¹

This excerpt from a letter written by the sisters to their friends and family highlights the sense of calling they felt towards their work. The sisters reached a point in their work where they felt they had to leave in order to continue to fulfil their mission. This chapter seeks to establish the reasons for their departure, as outlined in this letter. In short, the sisters believed that remaining part of the Order would not allow them to continue to meet their sense of purpose, which was embedded in community. They wanted to become part of the community themselves and not like the social workers that spent time in the area and left without much thought of what they were leaving behind. The letter demonstrates the strong sense of dedication the sisters felt towards their work as they worked to give themselves completely to their mission.

First, this chapter will explore the evaluation carried out by the sisters as part of the Aranui mission. This evaluation demonstrates how the strong sense of dedication and purpose felt by sisters helped their work to succeed in the community. This chapter will also look at the conflict between the Aranui Sisters and the Christchurch Congregation, with particular focus on how the sisters maintained their sense of mission as they worked with the Congregation to reach a solution. As will be seen by the end of this chapter the mission was ultimately successful as the sisters were able to expand their mission to help a whole new community of people.

²¹¹ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Sisters of Mercy Aranui and Parklands 1977-1979*.

A Time to Reflect

When it was established in 1973, the Aranui Community was set up as an experimental community which would come under evaluation after three years to determine whether this type of mission work was successful, if it needed to be adapted and what was working well. The evaluation of the Aranui community took place in 1975 and contained reflections from the three sisters on their work, the stories of some of the women and families they had helped. It also holds support from Parish priests, the Aranui High School headmaster and others from within the community who reflected on the success of the sisters' work in the first three years of their mission.

The experiment had begun as an attempt to translate the spirit of Catherine McAuley and the Gospel to the needs of contemporary society.²¹² In their evaluation, the sisters reflected that some of the isolation that had been part of people's lives had begun to be broken down as neighbours began to communicate with each other in ways that they had not done so before.²¹³ They also wrote, "We believe that the most important thing is the service of the poor and that community life and prayer are the resources needed for this."²¹⁴ The community welcomed the work they carried out and the demands placed upon the three sisters in their small community become much greater than they had anticipated. More and more people came to them for help, but with only three Sisters they were under increasing pressure to deal with the higher numbers of people.²¹⁵

As part of the evaluation process, the sisters asked various people involved in the Aranui community to comment on the success of their work so far, the impact they had on the community and to provide comment as to whether the work should continue. I. A. Snook, Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of Canterbury, was also invited to comment on their work and said in a letter published in the Evaluation, "I read the report with a deep sense of admiration for the work the sisters are doing and would be amazed if

²¹² Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Evaluation of the Sisters of Mercy Experimental Community Aranui 1975*, 57.

²¹³ Ibid., 54.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 56.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 55.

anyone could read it without such a reaction.”²¹⁶ Other community members such as Headmaster of Aranui High School, Arch Gilchrist, wrote, “The placement of the three Sisters in Aranui area has been to the inestimable advantage of this school ... In the two and a half years they have been here I have not once heard a critical comment.”²¹⁷ Support for the sisters’ work was also found in Parish Priest Father G. M. O’Connor who wrote a letter on his thoughts of the experimental community. He said, “I am convinced that the presence of Sisters living in a community such as Aranui is of great value to the people there, and would hope that it is possible for similar work to be done in similar communities in the future.”²¹⁸ Father O’Connor also wrote about the way the sisters conducted their work reflecting that,

A very careful approach was made in establishing themselves within the community. People observed that these were women of prayer, always calm and joyful, special to a degree because that were ‘nuns’, interested in problems, hospitable to all, willing to help in any situation, compassionate and not condescending.²¹⁹

Further support from within the local Catholic community came from the Saint Vincent de Paul Society’s A. Ashton who wrote, “your presence in the district has done much to reduce many of the prejudices against social workers and Religious alone with lowering much of the indifference of locals to their neighbours.”²²⁰ The sisters also earned the support of the Housing Corporation who wrote to acknowledge the work of the Sisters in the community saying, “The sisters’ availability, helpfulness and cheerfulness has been commented on many times by our tenants and is obvious to all those who have had dealings with them.”²²¹ Bishop Ashby also wrote a letter in response to the Evaluation but, significantly, the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy in Christchurch remained silent.²²²

²¹⁶ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Evaluation of North East Community Development Scheme (Sisters of Mercy) Experimental Community*, 2018.15.19.

²¹⁷ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Evaluation of the Sisters of Mercy Experimental Community Aranui 1975*, 44.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

²¹⁹ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Evaluation of the Sisters of Mercy Experimental Community Aranui 1975*, 41.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

²²² Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Sisters of Mercy Aranui and Parklands 1977-1979*.

As part of the evaluation of their work, the sisters shared a variety of stories about the women of Aranui, their situations and the ways in which they were able to support them. One woman the sisters met was Wendy, a twenty-seven-year-old mother with three young children aged eight, four and three months.²²³ Wendy was living with her alcoholic and unemployed partner Jim, with limited money and no control over her life. Jim drank away much of the family money and was violent towards Wendy, who would have left him had she anywhere else to go. In May 1974, the local parish priest received a cry for help from Wendy and he sent the sisters to help. Wendy had taken an overdose of valium and was in a frightening state of distress. Her doctor prescribed ninety tablets each month for her to take one three times a day for thirty days, however, Wendy had formed a habit of taking eight each day for the first eleven days of her prescription. The sisters spoke with Wendy and prayed with her in order to calm her down, Jim had not noticed her state of distress until the arrival of the sisters. The sisters continued to monitor Wendy's situation providing ongoing support. After a particularly distressing night in which Wendy had met her partners' violence with violence, she asked her doctor to admit her to the Fergusson Clinic as she felt she had to get away. The Fergusson Clinic was established as a place for people who needed a high degree of care in their everyday lives, who struggled to cope with the demands of modern life. Originally opened to care for the disabled, the Fergusson Clinic was also open to other members of the community who needed a break from the struggle of everyday life.²²⁴ Jim responded negatively, threatening Wendy that if she left for the clinic he would prevent her from entering the house and would take her children away from her. The sisters worked to help Wendy, including ringing her doctor, whose solution was to prescribe another ninety valium tablets. The sisters decided to put Wendy in contact with a woman who wanted to get involved in their work. This gave Wendy someone to talk to and a place to go when she needed to escape the confines of her house. Gradually her confidence began to grow and she began to risk spending the family benefit on clothes for the children as well as other goods such as fruit and meat, which provided Wendy with a sense of liberation. Wendy's mother wrote to the sisters thanking them for helping her daughter. She wrote, "It's lovely and a comfort to me to

²²³ The names given in the Sisters' Evaluation appear to have been changed for privacy reasons. The names used by the Sisters in their Evaluation are the names that appear in this study.

²²⁴ Dave Tarrant, "Fergusson Home Enhances Quality of Life," *N.Z. Disabled* 9 (1989): 20.

know she has a friend to confide in.”²²⁵ Wendy also wrote to the sisters to thank them for all their support saying, “Thank you for everything Sister Teresa. You are truly a wonderful friend.”

Wendy’s story is reminiscent of many women living in the suburbs who had very limited control over their own lives. The response of her doctor to provide medication as a solution to her mental distress was a common trend at the time.²²⁶ Many male doctors did not know how to respond to the distress many women in the suburbs were experiencing and resorted to prescribing heavy tranquillisers and other drugs as a solution to the problem. The sisters’ work demonstrates that what these women required was not more medication but support. They achieved this through providing a safe place for women to go outside of their homes and simply being willing to listen. What many women needed was to break down their barriers of isolation and to share their problems with someone other than themselves.

Another example of the support the sisters provided was through their ex-pupil “Kathy” who wrote her story in her own words describing the ways in which the sisters provided her with much-needed support. Kathy had married at the age of twenty-four. Sisters Pauline and Helen had attended her wedding with Sister Helen playing the organ. Kathy moved up to Wellington not long after her marriage and had her first baby a year later at twenty-five and just two years later, she gave birth to her second daughter. When her youngest daughter was only eight months old, her marriage broke up. Kathy returned to Christchurch, but her parents had since moved to Tauranga and her sister was the only family support that remained in Christchurch. Kathy recalled being in a state of severe unhappiness, feeling run-down and disillusioned. After receiving a particularly distressing letter from her husband, Kathy decided she needed to speak to someone and sought advice from a parish priest. The priest later rang the sisters to tell them of her present situation and they responded by helping to provide support and encouragement throughout her custody battle. Sister Teresa even travelled to Wellington with her to provide support. She wrote that,

²²⁵ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Evaluation of the Sisters of Mercy Experimental Community Aranui 1975*, 25.

²²⁶ Kedgley, *Mum’s the Word*, 220.

Sometimes I would ring Sister Teresa so upset I just had to talk to someone, but Sister is not just someone - she is so very special, she has helped me to see things through my husband's point of view, to face up to problems by myself, and really helped me to find a strength within myself, that I didn't know existed.²²⁷

Kathy wrote of how the support the sisters provided would not have been possible had they still been enclosed behind the convent walls: "I always used to think that they [the Sisters of Mercy] were a little too removed from outside life to understand me or my problems ... If they had not been down at Aranui I don't think I could have turned to them for help...."²²⁸

Kathy and Wendy's stories show the support many women in the suburbs needed in order to get through stressful situations such as the breakdown of a marriage and difficult custody battles. Their stories also reveal that the work the sisters were carrying out was made possible by their move outside of the convent. By making themselves more accessible to the community the sisters were able to provide a level of support that was not possible during their previous work at Villa Maria.

The Evaluation of their work demonstrates that changes were beginning to take effect in the community. For Sister Helen, the greatest difference she noticed in the community was "a growth of confidence, self-awareness amongst them, and openness to new experiences." She recalled how there was a strong sense of a lack of trust with no interaction between neighbours:

By meeting them and encouraging them to open up and talk to us enabled them in a way to start trusting other people. And we got to the point where we could perhaps invite a few of them to come together maybe they still didn't know each other very well but if they came together and had a cup of tea at our place and learnt that they were all pretty much in the same boat the level of trust started to rise I think.

Helen described the community of people as being, "very, very poor in confidence when we met them first."²²⁹ In the first three years of their work the sisters could see a shift in the community as according to them it was becoming more open and barriers were

²²⁷ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Evaluation of the Sisters of Mercy Experimental Community Aranui 1975*, 47.

²²⁸ Ibid., 48.

²²⁹ Sister Helen Goggin, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

beginning to break down. The response from various members of the community was positive to the changes that were starting to take place in the neighbourhood and commended the sisters' patient approach to establishing themselves in the area. The support they provided for women in the area such as Wendy and Kathy made apparent demonstrates the difference the sisters were trying to make in the community for women and families. The congregation voted to allow the Aranui Sisters to continue their work and in preparation for expanding their work into the suburbs of Parklands and Burwood three more Sisters joined, one in 1976 and two in 1977.

Conflict within the Congregation

In 1975, tensions with the Congregation began to unfold. At an assembly of the congregation in Christchurch, the Aranui Sisters were asked to give the assembled congregation their assurance that they would be willing to move back into the schools if required. The Aranui Sisters refused to give an answer without the opportunity to discuss their understanding of the vow of obedience.²³⁰ They were unwilling to move away from Aranui and return to the schools, which was seen as directly opposed to the Order's vow of obedience. Pauline recounted that this was the first time they sensed that they might have to part ways with the Order. Sister Teresa went back to St Mary's as principal to prevent any further alienation. She continued to live at their newly established Hampshire Street home but found that the two ways of living did not mix easily. With the passing of the Integrated Schools Act in 1975 Teresa was able to help appoint a lay principal for the college and with some relief returned to life in Aranui.²³¹

The tensions that arose from the sisters' unwillingness to move out of Aranui and continued throughout their mission work until a solution was reached in 1984. The sisters strongly believed that it was important to the success of their mission that they stay in the area where they had worked hard to build up close relationships with their neighbours over time. Sister Marie described how they felt about the ongoing conflict when she said,

We wanted to identify closely with the people and to do that we needed to stay grounded in our mission in Aranui and Parklands in order to

²³⁰ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 108.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

persevere the integrity of the mission and this meant that we were unwilling to be moved around to other places as needed.²³²

Pauline also wrote of the importance of staying in Aranui, in her book *A Changing Order*, she described how the people of Aranui were used to professional workers coming and going. This made it hard for the sisters to establish close relationships with their neighbours as they watched to see how long the sisters would last. The work they were doing in the community depended upon relationships that developed slowly and Pauline wrote that the best evidence they could give of their commitment to the area was "...to stay right there in their midst - not just any nuns, but us, Helen, Teresa and Pauline, women, friends and neighbours."²³³

Sister Marie described the effect these tensions had on their small community, as their experience was very different from the rest of the congregation:

So it was like a clash between the needs of the established congregation or institution and those of an experimental community...and it affected us in a way that when we were at meetings...we began to feel like strangers and the matters that the Order was turning its attention to seemed to have no relevance to the work that we were doing. It's like we were going down two different paths and our unwillingness to be moved back into the schools raised questions about our vow of obedience.²³⁴

Sister Marie continued on to describe how their understanding of the vow of obedience differed from that being enforced by the congregation,

We felt that were being true to the call of the spirit within our lives to live out the mission of Catherine McAuley and the Gospel and we needed to preserve the integrity of our mission and remain faithful to the call of the spirit in our lives.²³⁵

The Aranui Sisters reached a point where they felt that the only solution was to ask to be dispensed of their vows. In 1977 the sisters released a statement first to family and friends and then to the Christchurch Congregation and the Bishop. In their statement the sisters wrote that they felt called to commit themselves to the working class, to build up their confidence so that they could effect change themselves and begin to improve their

²³² Sister Marie McCrea, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

²³³ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 107.

²³⁴ Sister Marie McCrea, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

²³⁵ Ibid.

own situations.²³⁶ They wrote that by living in close proximity to the families and people they felt called to help they were able to bring a Christian influence into their lives through their actions.²³⁷ The sisters felt that they could no longer continue this work under the order of the Sisters of Mercy as they were legally bound to the Order meaning they could be asked to leave Aranui and placed in mission work elsewhere away from the work they felt called to do. They also cited being identified with Religious Orders that were becoming more affluent was an issue as they hoped to be able to identify with the poor and working-class people they worked alongside.²³⁸ The sisters hoped that they would be able to establish small Christian communities in low-income streets, they would continue to call themselves Sisters and hoped that eventually, the Church would grant its approval for this new way of life.

The sisters' decision to seek dispensation of their vows became a wider issue within the Congregation. Advice was sought from the Bishop and priests from around the country and even abroad. It was decided that in January 1978, the sisters would plan a structure for the new community and live this structure for twelve months before each Sister chose whether or not to commit herself. Father Molinari wrote a response to the questions asked of him by Sister Rosaline, Superior of the Christchurch Congregation, on the matter saying that he felt the situation was very unusual as the Aranui Sisters were asking to be dispensed of their vows but hoped to continue working in the same area. His concern was how people would react when they learnt that the sisters had abandoned the Sisters of Mercy, which had sent them into the area in the first place, and what effect this would have on their perception of the Church.²³⁹ What Father Molinari seems to have overlooked is that while the Congregation allowed Sisters Helen, Teresa and Pauline to move out of the convent and into the community, it was an idea initiated by the three Sisters who took it upon themselves to ask to be moved. Molinari also believed that the reasons for seeking dispensation were "very precarious" and even stated that the reasons were "non-existent" but there seemed to be an element of "close-mindedness" on the part of the Aranui Sisters over the decision.²⁴⁰

²³⁶ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Sisters of Mercy Aranui and Parklands 1977-1979*.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

The Congregation expressed concerns that the Aranui Sisters were becoming secretive and even possessive of the areas they were working in.²⁴¹ It also cited issues such as their involvement in family issues becoming “all absorbing and limiting in vision”, and their supposed failure to offer their services for training others to visit and identify with the poor.²⁴² The congregation expressed similar concern at their wishing to continue to work in Aranui after being dispensed of their vows. They came to the conclusion that it would be preferable that should the sisters leave the Order they would move on to another area, as to remain in Aranui would be to rely on “past support given because [they] were Sisters of Mercy...”²⁴³

Sister Marie recalled how during this difficult period in their mission Father Eugene O’Sullivan a Dominican Priest from Auckland came into their lives through their annual retreat. Sister Marie said,

He was horrified at the thought that we were going to leave because he felt that we were being true to the spirit of Vatican II and he suggested to us that we might not need to take the initiative he encouraged us to wait and let the congregation dismiss us all in its own time so we just carried on with our lives and our mission ...²⁴⁴

Father Eugene saw the legalities of their situation as the work of canon lawyers and suggested the sisters leave the work to them, reserving their energies for their mission work.²⁴⁵ Monsignor Hugh Doogan took on the Aranui Sisters’ case, however, his conclusion was not easy for the sisters to bear as he did not see a way to tie their work into canon law. Their only options were to remain part of the Order and be prepared to move wherever they were required or to leave the Order entirely.²⁴⁶

Father Francis Morrissey from the St Paul University in Ottawa was visiting New Zealand at the time and offered a different solution to the issue. While he agreed that Monsignor

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Sister Marie McCrea, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

²⁴⁵ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 109.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

Doogan had been correct in his interpretation of canon law, he proposed they try to fit their situation “between the lines”. He proposed a leave of absence drawing up a document that did not need to be sent to Rome for approval but was warmly accepted by Bishop Ashby and Sister Rosaline and her council.²⁴⁷ This solution was halted by Father Paul Molinari who rewrote the document replacing the term “leave of absence” with that of “exclaustration”. The alteration of the document meant that it now required approval from Rome and removed all of the flexibility of the original set out by Father Morrissey. When it came time for the sisters to sign the document, Sister Pauline recounted that she declared she was not prepared to do so. She cited the fact that the sisters had agreed to the original document, but not the one placed before them.²⁴⁸ Eventually in 1984 together with Sister Margaret Anne, Sister Rosaline’s successor, they came to a solution whereby the Order could delegate its authority through the General Superior to a community of Sisters such as Aranui. The Aranui Sisters had to make one alteration to their mission by appointing a Superior, as in order to comply with canon law each community need to have one; for twelve years the Aranui Sisters had been without a Superior, choosing to use a system of community discernment and decision making. The sisters drew lots to decide who should take on the title of Superior and it fell upon Sister Teresa to take on the new position.²⁴⁹

Throughout this difficult period in their mission, the Aranui Sisters took Father Eugene O’Sullivan’s advice and continued to focus on their mission. Sister Pauline wrote about how they continued to maintain a friendly relationship with their fellow Sisters, relying on their connections with Mercy values and long-standing friendships.²⁵⁰ The Aranui Sisters had faced tensions with their fellow Sisters early in their mission, but these had been mostly focused around a lack of understanding their call and a feeling that they were abandoning their positions within the Mercy schools. The conflict they faced during this period in their mission evolved out of differences in the interpretation of the vow of obedience. While the Aranui Sisters felt they were obeying their calling to work amongst the poor and working-class in society, the Congregation saw their unwillingness to move back into the schools as a violation of this vow. Eventually, these issues were solved

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 110.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 111.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

allowing the Aranui Sisters to continue their work through regulating their position within the Congregation. Throughout the conflict, the sisters maintained their financial independence, supporting themselves through the earnings of their designated breadwinner, this meant that their resources were not limited while they worked out their differences with the Congregation.

The Mission Succeeds

The success of the Aranui mission can be seen in the stories of women such as Wendy and Kathy and the difference having the sisters in the community made to their lives. The people in the community responded well to the work of the sisters. One solo mother said, “The area had no atmosphere, no spirit before you came; it’s changed somehow, you’ve changed it.”²⁵¹ Another woman, a widow with five children said, “It was good just to know you’re there”²⁵² For the sisters the success of their mission was in creating relationships with their neighbours and becoming accepted members of their community. Sister Helen recalled how it was, “the knowledge that we were accepted as friends and as people in whom they could confide,” that she was most proud of along with their ability to break down barriers.²⁵³ For Helen the fact that they did not restrict themselves by only working within the Catholic community was another aspect of their work she was particularly proud of she said:

The fact that we joined readily on inter-church relationships we had been very enclosed in the Catholic Church and had no knowledge whatever of people who went to other churches and how their worship went and we were part of the building up of that inter-church relationship that happened. We put forward ideas about how we could meet with other women on their grounds and that is probably the main thing I think, the barriers that were broken and the church barriers that always been part of our lives they were broken down.²⁵⁴

The dedication shown by the sisters to their mission throughout both the Evaluation process and their conflict with the Congregation is part of the reason for its success. The sisters felt a strong connection to their work and remained committed to the suburb of

²⁵¹ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Evaluation of North East Community Development Scheme (Sisters of Mercy) Experimental Community*, 2018.15.19.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Sister Helen Goggin, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

Aranui and the people they worked with, including women such as Wendy and Kathy who needed guidance and support. The success of their mission work can also be seen in the expansion of their work into Parklands and Burwood at the request of Father Kevin Burns.

Chapter Four

A Community in Need

“God, our Creator, we praise and thank you as we come together today. We ask the blessing of the Holy Spirit on all our undertakings as we work to enable people to have life more abundantly. May all that we do be for your glory and the good of your people.

Amen.”²⁵⁵

This prayer that was used by the North East Community Development Scheme to open many of their meetings outlines the key aims of the sisters’ work in the community to improve the lives of those living in the suburbs that they may “have life more abundantly”. This directed their work as they sought to improve the many social issues effecting people in the Eastern Suburbs of Christchurch in the communities of Aranui, Parklands and Burwood.

In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which throughout their time in Burwood and Parklands the sisters worked to establish a sense of community in the area. They brought people together by establishing a number of groups within the community and opened up their work to allow members of the community to take on positions of leadership. This chapter will focus on the many forms of community engagement established by the NECDS and the effect this had on members of the community, particularly women. This chapter will also look at the involvement of the Parish, which formed the NECDS, and at the scheme’s work with other Churches in the community as their labour crossed denominational boundaries.

Origins of North East Community Development Scheme

In 1977, at the request of parish priest Father Kevin Burns, the Aranui Sisters were asked to form a community in the Parish of Burwood in North East Christchurch.²⁵⁶ When asked what his motivations were for inviting the sisters to Parklands, Father Kevin responded,

²⁵⁵ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder from final AGM 25 February 2005*, 2018.15.6.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

I knew that there was something in their mission and in their ideals that could be repositioned in the Parish. They were changing their direction as religious ... and with their movement into the Parish, I saw a whole lot of new possibilities, in fact, a whole lot of new ways in which religious were relating to people. And I felt that I would like to work with them in a team situation in this new area to which I was appointed as pastor. And I saw possibilities seeing the limits of a sole pastor in the parish and seeing a whole new area with a community of religious sisters who really did have strong direction of where the mission of the Church was in the future.²⁵⁷

The request was taken to the Christchurch Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy who voted on the matter with the offer for a community of sisters in Parklands passing by 103 votes to 47. As with the move to Aranui, there were some reservations about the new community with some Sisters asking that volunteers be called for from outside the Congregation instead. They also argued that the final decision should be left to the council and that the project should be subject to evaluation.²⁵⁸ The Congregation provided their support through a letter addressed to Bishop Ashby saying, "After much prayer and study, we as a Congregation have decided to offer you a community of Sisters to be part of the mission of the Church in the North East with special reference to Parklands."²⁵⁹ With the blessing of the order, Sister Teresa, joined by Sisters Marie and Colleen, moved into Burwood to begin ministry in the area.

Part of the Burwood parish was a new suburb Parklands, which at the time was described as a "dessert waste."²⁶⁰ Marie describes how they found the area in 1977:

There was no means of support, no telephones, no shops, no banking facilities or medical services. New houses were built and the roads and footpaths were still under construction. The houses were occupied almost exclusively by young married couples with small children and they were isolated without any adequate support.²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ Father Kevin Burns, interview by author, Christchurch, November 20, 2019.

²⁵⁸ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Sisters of Mercy Aranui and Parklands 1975-1976*.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

²⁶¹ Sister Marie McCrea, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

Parklands in the mid 1970s was considered to be a social wasteland with streets and streets of new housing occupied mostly by young families,²⁶² large mortgages and no amenities, and with no preschools, doctors, shops, public transport, or jobs in the area there was limited places in which neighbours could gather to socialise.²⁶³ Teresa had a vision, driven by the need the sisters saw for a sense of community in Parklands, to transform the area. A strong sense of urgency was felt about the situation as without even a local shop many women were isolated in their homes for most of the day while their husbands went out to work. Ironically, the developer, Smiths Developments Ltd.,²⁶⁴ presented Parklands as a community space despite the fact that the local tavern was the only place with any sense of community feel.²⁶⁵ The sisters considered that loneliness, isolation, alienation and powerlessness were commonplace amongst people in the eastern suburbs.²⁶⁶ Beverly McNabb reflected that when she moved to the east in 1973, "...people just lived in their houses and went to work."²⁶⁷ There was almost no connection between neighbours as Beverly describes having to work to establish a sense of community for herself in the area. For Parklands as well as Aranui, part of the issues facing those in the suburbs was that they felt that it was very difficult to feel as though they belonged. Many residents and did not trust their neighbours not wanting to get too close in case they got hurt, choosing to stay isolated and lonely instead.²⁶⁸ Through their mission, the Aranui Sisters worked to help the community as a whole, but they gave particular attention to married and solo mothers who were often most affected by isolation.²⁶⁹

²⁶² The sisters referred to the state area upon their arrival as both a "social wasteland" and "desert waste" from the early 1980s in presentations, interviews and written material.

²⁶³ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

²⁶⁴ Ashleigh Stewart, "A Life of Work, A Legacy for Thousands," *Stuff*, May 21, 2016.

²⁶⁵ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

²⁶⁶ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Correspondence - Miscellaneous, Including Funding*, 2018.15.11.

²⁶⁷ Beverly McNabb, interview by author, Christchurch, January 10, 2020.

²⁶⁸ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

²⁶⁹ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Overview of North East Community Development Scheme 1979-95 by Tony McChon*, 2018.15.12.

With help from Father Kevin Burns, the sisters worked closely with key groups already working in the area such as the local Anglican minister and the Waimari District Council to understand how they could respond to the emerging needs. According to Sister Marie, one of the first things the sisters did alongside Father Kevin was to knock on doors, “with simple questions eliciting what people would like to see happening in this brand new area. So we were getting a feeling from the people of what their needs were...”²⁷⁰ These questions included how long they had lived in the area, if they knew their neighbours, if they felt at home in the neighbourhood and whether they were involved in local affairs or wanted to get involved.²⁷¹ They hired out an empty shop in the newly developed shopping centre, which opened in the early 1980s, to set up a drop-in centre where people could come and talk. They also worked with the Council to get the necessary amenities for the area, such as a bank, which opened in 1982.²⁷² For Sister Marie, this work was about, “setting up places where people could come and just meet one another and meet us and begin to talk to one another.”²⁷³ They used any opportunity to engage people including the 1977 United Women’s Convention where they invited some local women to join them at the conference and in 1978 the Social Development Council set up discussion papers centred around the ideas of “Have Crisis, Can Cope” and “Housework and Caring: Can Men Do Better?” The sisters used these topics to ignite discussion within the community and to engage women to talk about the common issues they were facing in the suburbs.

A strong belief held by the sisters was that if people were provided with the right resources and felt a sense of community their lives would be greatly improved. In an interview given in 1979, Sister Teresa said: “If the Government and local bodies took greater care in setting up housing areas and took more interest in community building, most social problems would not eventuate.”²⁷⁴ She went on to say that, the Minister of Social Welfare was so impressed by their work that he offered to pay them and provide them with a house to use. They turned down the offer as they wanted to maintain their

²⁷⁰ Sister Marie McCrea, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

²⁷¹ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

²⁷² Katie Pickles, email message to author, February 19, 2020.

²⁷³ Sister Marie McCrea, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

²⁷⁴ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

independence, which had been important to the Sister's mission since its beginnings in Aranui. They chose to stay in their statehouse on Ashwood Street. By remaining self-supporting there was no expectation placed upon their work; instead, they were able to enter the parish as parishioners with no financial support from the Church or other organisation.²⁷⁵

Several groups were set up to help breakdown the isolation in the community: coffee groups, reading groups, and toddler groups among many others were set up as places where women could come together to meet each other, form friendships and support networks. "[They] provided a supportive and safe environment for people to foster friendships and obtain mutual support."²⁷⁶ As the number of groups increased there was a need for a governing body to give a sense of unity to the work being conducted throughout the community. An umbrella group was formed which gradually evolved into the Aranui/Parklands Development Scheme, reflecting their continuing work in both Aranui and Parklands. It was not until 1987 that their mission officially changed its name to the North East Community Development Scheme (NECDS).²⁷⁷ While it originated out of the Holy Family Parish in Burwood, the NECDS saw a need to respond to the Holy Spirit not just in the Church but also in the wider community.²⁷⁸ It, therefore, grew to include many members outside of the Parish, as like the Sister's work in Aranui, their work was non-denominational, crossing religious boundaries to better serve the community. The scheme was a mission to the wider community, originally run by parishioners but growing to include many outside of the parish as well.²⁷⁹ It was about empowering people to recognise their own talents as the sisters understood that the community had the resources to meet their own needs the people simply needed help to recognise the ways in which they could help.²⁸⁰ They worked to encourage people, particularly women, to

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Correspondence - Miscellaneous, Including Funding*, 2018.15.11.

²⁷⁷ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

²⁷⁸ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Overview of North East Community Development Scheme 1979-95 by Tony McChon*, 2018.15.12.

²⁷⁹ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

²⁸⁰ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Master Copy of North East Community Development Scheme Material*, 2019.15.29.

discover and develop their potential and leadership qualities, building up self-esteem and confidence within the community.²⁸¹

The North East Parish

Central to the work of the NECDS was the North East Parish (also known as Holy Family) in Burwood. The scheme developed out of the work being carried out by the sisters as part of their work in the Parish with Father Kevin. A sense of community and building relationships was an important part of their ministry. The parish was based around the value of community, which extended beyond the usual limits of the Parish through the NECDS and into the wider community.²⁸² The Burwood Parish was returning to the early beginnings of the church and the role of the Parish as gathering of neighbours with a similar Christian faith. The term parish itself in its original Greek form *para oikias* means neighbourhood. The Burwood Parish intended to return to this concept of the parish by altering the modern parish to provide a smaller and more meaningful sense of belonging so that parishioners could get to know each other.²⁸³ For Beverly McNabb, this return to community was an important part of life in the Parish. She recalls how Father Kevin brought people together:

He got people to talk to one another and we chatted to people afterwards for ages and the older children got to know one another and you know it began to be a place to feel quite comfortable in.²⁸⁴

The importance of this sense of community to the Burwood Parish can be expressed in a Homily given by Father Kevin to his parishioners in August 1986:

“The Church is a community of people actively concerned for one another, really interested in one another, having time for one another and loving one another deeply. If it is not that, it is not the Church Jesus wants it to be. Each of us makes the Church more or less when we love or fail to

²⁸¹ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

²⁸² Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Box of Burwood Parish Material*, 2018.15.31.

²⁸³ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Neighbourhood Groups - North East Christchurch Parish - Includes Material on Building Parish Groups*, 2018.15.23.

²⁸⁴ Beverly McNabb, interview by author, Christchurch, January 10, 2020.

love, when we help or fail to help, when we pray or fail to pray for others.”²⁸⁵

The Parish initially established three groups, which formed the base of the Church with a sense of community in Christ.²⁸⁶ These groups were established by the parishioners. As Father Kevin recalls, “They came up with three sub-committees which was really the base of the Parish for the next twenty years and they saw three areas of concern where they would develop as a Parish: Social Justice, Community and Liturgy.”²⁸⁷ He continued on to say that, the parishioners conducted surveys of the Parish talking to people and they, “sensed that there was a lot of isolation and that people would love to become part of an ongoing community development.” Out of this need and the new parish structure came the neighbourhood groups.²⁸⁸ It was hoped that these groups would give members of the Parish a sense of belonging to a “parish unit” smaller than the Parish in size and allowing its members to get to know each other on a more personal level.²⁸⁹ The Parish established a number of different community groups and education programs from the Family Living Group, getting involved in Christian Action Week activities, organising youth trips to Hanmer Springs and the House Mass Group. The House Mass Group was a particularly successful group celebrating a monthly daytime Mass and providing an opportunity for women in the area to meet in an informal environment to pray and worship together. Women offered their homes as a meeting place and were supported in preparation by two leaders who were responsible to the Umbrella Group.²⁹⁰ The Parish began in the mid-1970s and by 1985 there had been sixty-two different groups in action outside of Sunday worship.²⁹¹ The success of this form of ministry and the wide range of groups is evident in the 1985 survey conducted by the Parish, which found that many of

²⁸⁵ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Box of Burwood Parish Material*, 2018.15.31.

²⁸⁶ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

²⁸⁷ Father Kevin Burns, interview by author, Christchurch, November 20, 2019.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Neighbourhood Groups - North East Christchurch Parish - Includes Material on Building Parish Groups*, 2018.15.23.

²⁹⁰ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Box of Burwood Parish Material*, 2018.15.31.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

its members appreciated the family orientation of the Parish, and over half chose community spirit as their main reason for being members of the Burwood Parish.²⁹²

The relationships established through this new approach to Parish life was of great importance to the people living in the communities. Beverly and her family were involved in a range of parish initiatives. As she recalls,

So Michael and I with our children and three other couples with there children formed a base Christian Community Group which meant we were very in touch with each other to worship and pray and to share resources. In fact 40 odd years on, 43 I think, we are still sharing a lawnmower with one of the couples from that group. The relationships became very deep and very important to us.²⁹³

The importance of these deep and long-lasting relationships are further exemplified by Beverly, who has maintained these relationships many years after the scheme came to its conclusion through her involvement with the W.E.B. Group (Women Ex-Burwood):

I'm still part of a number of groups, I'm part of a women's group that started twenty years ago we meet every month ... and that's an amazing group of five women who share our lives just so deeply and beautifully.²⁹⁴

For Beverly, it is the relationships that developed which are particularly important. The importance of building relationships and developing community had been an important part of the mission and something that they worked to achieve with Father Kevin through the North East Community Development Scheme.

The importance of involving parishioners in the work of the church formed the basis of the book written by Father Kevin and Sister Pauline entitled *Parish for the People in the Pews*, which aimed to provide a resource for parish discussion and recognise the role of the ordinary parishioner. In this work, they wrote that "The parish even if only a sociological entity, still plays an important part in offering solidarity, support and a sense of belonging to its individual members."²⁹⁵ Since Vatican II laity was increasingly being encouraged to become involved in the matters of the church. One reviewer of their work wrote that "our

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Beverly McNabb, interview by author, Christchurch, January 10, 2020.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Publication "Parish for the People in the Pews" by Fr Kevin Burns PP and Sr Pauline O'Regan RSM*, 2018.15.21, 16.

laity only need encouragement” and that this is why they considered this work to be a “Godsend”.²⁹⁶ The work of Father Kevin, Sister Pauline and the rest of the Aranui Sisters showed it was possible to encourage people to become involved in parish activities and enrich the lives of their parishioners. The parish leaders placed huge importance on “recognising, supporting and celebrating the talents of all people.” While also understanding that people become involved in parish life at different levels and sometimes not at all depending on their personal choices.²⁹⁷ The North East Parish was different from the traditional idea of a parish pre-Vatican II as stated in an address given by a group of parishioners in celebration of Father Kevin’s twenty-five years as an ordained Priest. The parishioners described him as a man who, “believed that the days of the solitary Priest in the parish were gone and he sought to be part of a community.”²⁹⁸ This was a stark contrast to the parish prior to Vatican II, which placed the priest as the solitary leader whose word was considered law.

A Common Mission

As mentioned earlier in the chapter and Chapter Three, the sisters worked alongside other churches in the community, such as the Presbyterian Church, helping to build up inter-church relationships. Together they were able to participate in broader forms of community engagement and mission work.

The cross-denominational work was surrounded by the wider historical trend of charismatic renewal that spread throughout New Zealand in the 1960s and 1970s.²⁹⁹ That renewal saw different denominations working together planning activities such as prayer groups and discussing their differences. The National Council of Churches was a key organisation, which helped to facilitate many community engagement activities. Formed in 1941 the National Council of Churches included a number of different denominations including the Church of England, the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church, and the

²⁹⁶ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Box of Burwood Parish Material*, 2018.15.31.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ See: Michael Andrew Reid, *“But By My Spirit: A History of The Charismatic Renewal In Christchurch 1960-1985,”* (PhD, University of Canterbury, 2003).

Baptist Union among many others.³⁰⁰ The Catholic Church was not, however, part of the Council but joined the Conference of Churches in Aotearoa New Zealand, the National Councils' new body formed in 1988.³⁰¹ On working with other Churches in the area Father Kevin said,

At that time [the] Health Department and also Commission for the Future, which was a Government organisation they put out community programmes for people to gather together and study... Other government and local bodies...were encouraging people to get together and to talk over social issues, or issues that effected their lives, and they relied very much on the Church to pick this up. The National Council of Churches which was a great body and the Catholic Church they would pick up anything the community wanted to and we actually would do a lot to get that going in the communities because we had the ability we had all the people. So we joined very much in those community studies as they were called.³⁰²

In working alongside other churches, the North East Parish was able to share how their newly developed Parish structure and community development programs worked. According to Father Kevin,

Some of them really liked the idea of the community development so they came and actually talked to the community people. So we didn't want to say that ours was the only way but we kind of knew that our structure was peculiar to ourselves but we felt it was universal enough to go anywhere.³⁰³

In this way, the local Churches were able to learn from each other and develop their mission work to better serve the community by seeing what process worked for other Churches in the area.

One group the sisters also worked closely alongside was the Iona Community, which was comprised of a core group including Reverend Donald Malloch, Catherine Vickers and Sister Anne O'Regan. The group, which were part of the Iona Presbyterian Parish in

³⁰⁰ A. H. McIntock, ed., "National Council of Churches," in *An Encyclopaedia Of New Zealand* 1966. Te Ara - The Encyclopedia of New Zealand. Accessed 11 Dec 2019.

³⁰¹ "Open Letter by the New Zealand Fellowship of Christian Churches's first President, Mr. A. van Echten, 1991." NZ Protestant. Accessed December 11, 2019.

³⁰² Father Kevin Burns, interview by author, Christchurch, November 20, 2019.

³⁰³ Ibid.



Figure 4: Rev. David Pierce, Sister Ann O'Regan, Esma, and Rev. Don Malloch at the Iona Community on Breezes Road. (Source: "Night without power at Iona Community," *Christchurch Star*, August 6, 1980. Accessed December 11, 2019. <https://discoverywall.nz/media/73151>).

Aranui, later grew to involve Dick Tasker and Reverend David Pierce.³⁰⁴ The community, which was based on Breezes Road, worked to provide shelter for young people who were vulnerable and at risk, working alongside Probation Services, Social Welfare, the Justice Department and Aranui High School. The group's ministry was similar to the Aranui Sisters as they too valued neighbourliness and saw the importance of building trusting relationships and encouraging self-confidence in the community.³⁰⁵ The Iona Community even took part in the North East Energy Group Protest, which protested the increasing rise in electricity prices, which were becoming out of reach for the ordinary family (see Figure 4).

³⁰⁴ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Sisters of Mercy Aranui and Parklands 1977-1979*.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

The Sister's mission and the work of the North East Development Scheme was embraced by other Churches in Aranui, Burwood and Parklands as they worked alongside each other in their different forms of mission work. Father Kevin reflected on this cross-denominational work: "regarding our particular mission there wasn't anyone quite like that and yet we could all fit in with each other's mission at times."³⁰⁶ This statement shows how the different missions taking place in the community were able to work alongside each other for the benefit of the community.

The Community Comes Together

One of the main features of the NECDS was the various community groups set up to meet the different needs of the people living in the suburbs. Coffee groups, playgroups for mothers and children, book clubs, social groups for older people in the community, women's awareness groups, social and support groups for new mothers were all set up, providing a place for people to come, socialise and meet new people living in the area.³⁰⁷ One of the first groups was set up when the sisters approached two local women, Frances and Helen, with the idea to initiate a gathering. A letter was dropped to neighbouring letterboxes in the area inviting women to come for a cup of tea. Five women and their babies turned up, all of whom were keen to meet up again and the group continued to meet for eighteen months alternating between Frances and Helens' homes.³⁰⁸ The group then came to its natural conclusion when their children began to attend the toddlers' group, which had been set up by Sister Teresa for mothers to bring their children together and socialise. Seeing the amount of spiritual and psychological deprivation Teresa sought to create an environment where women could bring their children and socialise with other mothers who were facing similar issues. Some mothers did not know any other children and had no idea what their children should be doing throughout different stages of their development. Many felt that one of the only places they were welcome to bring their children was to Sunday Mass.³⁰⁹ In establishing a group for mothers and their children, Teresa and the scheme were able to help these women

³⁰⁶ Father Kevin Burns, interview by author, Christchurch, November 20, 2019.

³⁰⁷ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

find the support they needed. Providing them with a place in which they could talk with other mothers and engage with other children in a social context. Through the many groups, they found that emotional, spiritual and mental health needs could often be met, lessening the workload of social workers, marriage counsellors and psychiatrists.³¹⁰ Many people joined these groups because they simply needed a place where they felt like they belonged and could feel comfortable. Sister Teresa saw these community groups as a “vision of what the parish could be.”³¹¹ They hoped to transform it into a place for likeminded people to come together helping each other to break down the sense of isolation many had felt living in Parklands in the mid 1970s.

The groups could also provide education and learning, as well as social contact with groups such as the Parklands Women’s Group (P.W.G.). The P.W.G. held fortnightly coffee mornings and once a month a nightly meeting open to all of Parklands where they would hold informative talks given by people such as the public health nurse, the Breast Cancer Society and local teachers.³¹² From the PWG many women became involved in setting up other groups such as book clubs, a playgroup and a wool craft group. Within the parish a large number of groups were setup, meeting either in people’s homes or in the parish hall, to benefit not just the parish but the local community as well. These groups included a Gardening Group, Hen Co-op, Environment Group, Dorcas Group, Community Group, The Lukan Group, Youth Forum, Young Marrieds Group, North East Coffee Groups and many more (see Appendix 3 for full list). These groups met specific needs within the community such as the Young Marrieds Group, which was formed to provide young married couples with a place to support each other and develop their marriages. As Beverly says, these groups not only helped to build relationships and strengthen community but also helped the community to share knowledge:

So people got to know each other, people learnt to share things like there was gardening groups so that people learnt to garden a bit differently, so there was lots of knowledge building as well as community building.³¹³

Although the sisters’ main focus was based around reducing the sense of loneliness and isolation amongst young mothers and other women in the area a small men’s group was

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Box of Burwood Parish Material*, 2018.15.31.

³¹³ Beverly McNabb, interview by author, Christchurch, January 10, 2020.

also established as a place where men could come together and discuss the issues affecting their lives such as coping with their changing roles.³¹⁴ The success of these groups can be seen in the large numbers of people who attend them with approximately 250 people participating in the different courses and groups run by the scheme most of whom were women. Although a small number of men volunteered within the scheme, it always maintained a female majority.³¹⁵ The groups helped to alleviate much of the social sickness of isolation and loneliness as regardless of the purpose of the group the outcome was always a growing sense of trust and friendship.³¹⁶

The sisters came to realise that while many problems could be solved through providing support in different community groups some women required help that they could not themselves offer. At this time Sister Marie was breadwinner for the group working as a social worker for Catholic Social Services so they asked if it would be possible for Marie to work two days a week out of their home in Palmers Road, which the sisters had bought and lived in since 1987, to provide counselling services within the community. Together with Catholic Social Services, they formed a partnership that allowed the sisters to expand their work in developing community and complimenting their work through community groups.³¹⁷

A lack of recognition of the work carried out by mothers and housewives added to the problem women in the community were facing, as many women felt their work was unappreciated and worthless. The release of Jenny Phillips' work "Mothers Matter Too" in 1983 saw a significant response from women as they hoped it would help to improve recognition for their neglected status as mothers and housewives.³¹⁸ Jenny Phillips wrote that mothers were being led to believe that the work they do lacked value. She argued

³¹⁴ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Box of Burwood Parish Material*, 2018.15.31.

³¹⁵ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

³¹⁶ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Publication "I Can Change Anything (But Not on my Own)" by Srs Teresa O'Connor and Pauline O'Regan RSM*, 2018.15.20.

³¹⁷ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

³¹⁸ Carlyon and Morrow, *Changing Times*, 238.

that women internalise these messages telling themselves that their work is of little value and wonder why they feel so depleted and tired.³¹⁹

This dissatisfaction felt by women in the home was a factor in the rise of the women's liberation movement in New Zealand.³²⁰ Women's liberation groups were particularly critical of the lowly status accorded to housework, childcare and the people who performed these duties who were mostly women.³²¹ The act of giving housework and childcare such a lowly status it impacted negatively on the mental health of women, who saw their work as unworthy and unappreciated. Women's work was physically and emotionally demanding, something that went largely unrecognised³²² The women's liberation movement hoped to improve recognition of the work women were doing around the home and also to remove the stigma around working mothers and placing children in childcare. The work the sisters carried out in the community intended to address the issues that were affecting many mothers in the suburbs by opening their work to include support from Catholic Social Services to help these women in a way the sisters recognised they could not.

As well as establishing a range of community groups within the community, the NECDS also ran several courses to help provide members of the community with valuable skills that they were lacking. Assertiveness was one area that was identified early on as something people in the community needed, so courses on training women to be assertive were given a prominent place in the ongoing community development work.³²³ Other courses were also run such as "Understanding and Overcoming Shame," "The Art of Listening and Leadership," "Learning how to be Assertive," "Building Confidence and Self-Esteem" and "Caring for Ourselves."³²⁴ As like the community groups, these courses had a similar effect on the local people as Marie recalled it did not matter what the course was people would just enrol for them all,

³¹⁹ Phillips, *The Mother Manual*, 50-51.

³²⁰ Kedgley, *Mum's the Word*, 232.

³²¹ Macdonald, *The Vote, The Pill and the Demon Drink*, 161.

³²² McKinlay, "Where Would We Be without Them?," 351.

³²³ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

³²⁴ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder Containing Floppy Discs Containing Templates and Information on Scheme*, 2018.15.22.

Because what they really wanted to do was to come together and share and learn from one another it was the contact that they were really yearning for and they had that through enrolling for a course.³²⁵

Empowering Local Women

The sisters hoped to take their ministry a step further than their original community building work by shifting their focus to community development. The concept of community development as used by the sisters and the NECDS was defined as going beyond community building following a method of building community that incorporates a growing number of people who themselves continue to become more qualified and to work with others in the area.³²⁶ They believed that “Community development happens best when its members have a healthy confidence in themselves as individuals and are confirmed in the talents they possess.”³²⁷ Over their years spent in the community, the sisters gradually came to realise that while their work was successful at building up relationships in the community it was having a limited lasting impact on the wider community. The sisters decided to switch their work to focus on training people to help themselves.³²⁸ The sisters hoped to be able to help the community to be self-sufficient in meeting their own needs and opened up the scheme to allow for the involvement of members of the community in their work as co-workers and community workers within the scheme. In 1978, the scheme involved its first community helper in assisting in the running of a self-awareness course.³²⁹ Through the scheme, the sisters offered support and training for local women in learning how to lead community groups. They also provided training in counselling and self-development, in teaching women skills such as how to cope with stress and public speaking.³³⁰ Through this work, they empowered disadvantaged women, some of whom had no formal qualifications and others who

³²⁵ Sister Marie McCrea, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

³²⁶ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Publication “I Can Change Anything (But Not on my Own)” by Srs Teresa O’Connor and Pauline O’Regan RSM*, 2018.15.20, 4.

³²⁷ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

³²⁸ Mike Crean, “Sister of Mercy says award for community,” *The Press*, June 4, 2001.

³²⁹ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

³³⁰ Ibid.

through becoming mothers had become isolated and depressed in suburban life. Often women began their involvement with the scheme through attending courses or community groups and gradually came to be responsible for leading these groups and courses as co-workers within the scheme. Co-worker certificates were given at the conclusion of courses, which provided an important incentive for attendance of the wide range of courses that taught leadership skills, assertiveness, confidence and self-esteem, parenting and dealing with stress.³³¹ Their members were all united together in “a common spirituality”.³³² The sisters strongly believed in people “growing and developing” and formed their spiritual base around this concept as they began to involve more people in their work.³³³ In doing so, they helped to empower women in the community providing them with the confidence and training they needed to become active members in their communities.

Most of the volunteers involved in the NECDS were women, many of whom only became involved in the scheme after their youngest children had begun primary school. By participating in the scheme these women were able to achieve a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. However, their involvement could also become a point of tension if their work clashed with other aspects of their life such as childcare.³³⁴ One of the co-workers Cathy found her involvement with the scheme useful as, “In the scheme when you do take the role as a leader, it’s as a co-leader so that you’re not doing anything on your own, which I like.”³³⁵ Another woman, Anne-Marie, felt that “I had the skills; I just didn’t have the confidence to put them into practice. The difference was having someone to discuss my problem with.”³³⁶ For both of these women, the means of support and

³³¹ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Overview of North East Community Development Scheme 1979-95 by Tony McChon*, 2018.15.12.

³³² Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

³³³ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, “*Women Frontors: Supervision in a Leadership Training Programme with a Community Development Programme*” by Lorraine Petelo, 2018.15.25, 20.

³³⁴ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, “*Seeing Things Differently: A Study of Women Participating in Leadership Training with a Community Development Scheme*,” by Lorraine Petelo, 2018.15.26, 11.

³³⁵ Ibid., 14.

³³⁶ Ibid., 16.

encouragement provided by the strong system of leadership and supervision helped them to feel more comfortable and confident in their involvement.

In the 1970s, placing children in paid childcare was still seen as mothers neglecting their children. The issue became a significant part of the women's liberation movement, as without adequate childcare mothers were not free to enter into the workforce. Working mothers continued to be accused of neglecting their children by placing them in childcare but these same criticisms often did not apply to the rich who could afford private childcare.³³⁷ This issue also had a significant impact on the sisters' work within the community, as women were less likely to become involved in the scheme if their children were not at school. For many women childcare issues prevented them not only from working but also from becoming active members of their communities. Through their work in the community, the Aranui Sisters found that women often wanted to join a group but would choose not to as they worried about their children and had to be reassured that their children would not be a "nuisance."³³⁸ Part of the problem was that women had internalised the stigma surrounding childcare. The Aranui Sisters discovered that when they first moved to Parklands in 1977 and began their community work, "the great majority of young mothers whom we met held strongly to the view that no child of theirs should ever be cared for in a creche. They saw it as a kind of betrayal of their ideals of parenting."³³⁹ The sisters believed that childcare was needed to allow women to venture out of their homes. In many of the groups established by the NECDS, the sisters ensured that children were either welcome or that there was a suitable space for children to be cared for while their mothers met.³⁴⁰ This allowed more women to become active members of these groups.

As women moved into the workforce in the 1970s, they threatened the traditional power structure of the family.³⁴¹ While it was becoming more acceptable for women to enter the workforce, doing so came with its own issues for women's mental health. The focus on

³³⁷ Herd, *Cracks in the Glass Ceiling*, 41.

³³⁸ O'Regan and O'Connor, *Community Give It A Go!*, 54.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

³⁴¹ Alice Kessler-Harris. *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 319.

mothers in the workplace while successfully promoting the idea that mothers could balance work and motherhood also affected those mothers who chose to stay at home as they began to feel inadequate.³⁴² As ideas about motherhood began to change, women who managed to juggle motherhood and career came to be viewed by popular media as “superwomen.” These women were glamorised and seen as “having it all,” as they could have their babies and a career too.³⁴³ The sisters worked to alleviate these issues, by only asking women to commit to the amount of work they knew they could comfortably handle and provided each co-worker with a strong network of support and supervision.

Participants who were asked to join the scheme in an official capacity were required to undertake community leadership training and were provided with the support and supervision of a “frentor.” The core group, which was made up of the five Sisters, felt that the concept of support within the scheme was not embodied within the term “Supervisor”, instead choosing the word frentor to describe the supervisory relationship. The word frentor combined the ideas of friendship and mentoring forming a mutual partnership where the frentor and frentoree could work together.³⁴⁴ The role of the frentor was to listen carefully to others with an open mind and present advice and solutions to any issues the frentoree may be facing in their work.³⁴⁵ This system was largely based around working alongside women providing encouragement and support and helping them to become valuable members of the community.³⁴⁶ For workers like Cathy and Anne-Marie, this system was important to them not feeling alone in their work but rather having support and encouragement from an experienced worker. The success of this model of community development is evident in the way that many of the men and women who worked for the scheme went on to gain paid employment in a community development-based job.³⁴⁷

³⁴² Kedgley, *Mum's the Word*, 234.

³⁴³ Ibid., 308.

³⁴⁴ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, “*Women Frentors: Supervision in a Leadership Training Programme with a Community Development Programme*” by Lorraine Petelo, 2018.15.25, 8-9.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 13.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 22.

³⁴⁷ Sister Marie McCrea, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.



Figure 5: Sister Pauline and Sister Teresa with their newly published book *Community Give It A GO!* (Source: Sisters of Mercy Archives).

In order to help prevent burn out, the NECDS offered rewards to their volunteer workers. This prevented workers from feeling as though their work was unappreciated and provided them with an incentive to continue with their work within the scheme. Rewards included training opportunities and the chance to work closely with a more experienced volunteer worker, and the presentation of a certificate acknowledging two years of work within the scheme as a co-worker or a diploma after a further three years as a community worker.³⁴⁸ The scheme provided its workers with a small monetary remuneration, which while not a large amount, was seen by the Core Group as important in acknowledging the work and commitment for the women who helped run their courses and community

³⁴⁸ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Publication "I Can Change Anything (But Not on my Own)" by Srs Teresa O'Connor and Pauline O'Regan RSM*, 2018.15.20, 30.

groups.³⁴⁹ Contracts also formed an important part of preventing burn out as they outlined clearly the responsibilities of the volunteer and allowed the volunteer to choose how involved they wanted to be. The contract was agreed upon by both the volunteer and their supervisor signed and sent to the planning committee, so everyone had a clear understanding of what was agreed to.³⁵⁰ It was the role of the supervisor to ensure that the contract was adhered to and the volunteer involved in any decision making and given the appropriate expense allowance. By adhering to this process, it prevented volunteers from becoming overworked and helped them to feel as though they were being supported and valued in their work.

In 1989, Sisters Teresa and Pauline wrote *Community Give It A Go!* (see Figure 5). They hoped the book would become a resource that would help people to engage in their own forms of community work saying in an interview that, “We’ve found that many people who would like to do voluntary work don’t know how to get started and that many who are already involved tend to suffer from ‘burn out’.”³⁵¹ Through their work in the suburbs, they had come to realise that many people wanted to become involved in the community but many did not know how. Their book aimed to address the issues of loneliness and isolation by discussing their experiences and what had worked or not worked within their community. For example, they quickly came to realise that a group should only be established if someone in the community expressed need, as early on in their work a number of their groups failed as they did not possess clear goals or direction and when the program came to its conclusion they disbanded not knowing how to continue.³⁵² The work also deals with the issue of burn out which was a concern the sisters had in establishing the NECDS. They realised that in most parishes ten per cent of parishioners end up doing ninety per cent of the work which results in those ten per cent becoming overloaded and burning out.³⁵³ Part of this process was in forming a contract with their

³⁴⁹ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, “*Seeing Things Differently: A Study of Women Participating in Leadership Training with a Community Development Scheme*” by Lorraine Petelo, 2018.15.26, 7.

³⁵⁰ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Publication “I Can Change Anything (But Not on my Own)”* by Srs Teresa O’Connor and Pauline O’Regan RSM, 2018.15.20, 12.

³⁵¹ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Neighbourhood Groups - North East Christchurch Parish - Includes Material on Building Parish Groups*, 2018.15.23.

³⁵² O’Regan and O’Connor, *Community Give It A Go!*, 48-49.

³⁵³ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

volunteer workers, which helped to clarify expectations, and the women undertaking the work knew exactly what they were getting into and what was required of them.³⁵⁴ They attribute the success of so many of their groups and the reason many of these groups have continued over a number of years to the strong leadership and structures.³⁵⁵ In their follow up book, entitled *I Can Change Anything (But Not On My Own)* Teresa and Pauline addressed these issues in what became a “how-to book” or reference manual for people working amongst members of their community. The work outlined how to provide support for community workers so that they do not feel as though they are being exploited or unappreciated, how to establish small groups and keep them running. The book outlined the importance of planning and of having clear goals and strong leadership. It also touched on the importance of evaluating work regularly, which the NECDS carried out yearly to determine any areas that needed improving or that were working well.

The work of the NECDS helped to transform the area from what was seen as a social wasteland into a well-connected community. This was achieved through the many social groups that were established providing people with an opportunity to connect and develop long-lasting relationships. The work of the scheme also brought together different Church groups crossing denominational boundaries to work together for the community. Another important aspect of the scheme was the way in which the sisters empowered local women to become involved, take on leadership roles and develop their skills, which allowed a number of women to enter into the workforce through the education and training opportunities provided by the NECDS.

³⁵⁴ O'Regan and O'Connor, *Community Give It A Go!*, 39.

³⁵⁵ O'Regan and O'Connor, *Community Give It A Go!*, 53; Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Overview of North East Community Development Scheme 1979-95 by Tony McChon*, 2018.15.12.

Chapter Five

Community in Action

The Social Justice [Group] went and did a survey in the Parish ... and they went door to door, and one of the discoveries was that people were finding the price of electricity exorbitant and they came back and they reflected on that. Then they said well we've got to do something about it.³⁵⁶

This statement from Father Kevin regarding the establishment of the North East Energy protest demonstrates the way the community was energised to engage with social justice issues affecting the community. Father Kevin reflected that through working with the Social Justice Group in the Parish “community had become alive” and any issue that affected people in the community or the wider world became an issue for discussion within the Parish.³⁵⁷

This chapter will explore the way in which the North East Energy Group shows growing confidence in the community as people came together to raise awareness and protest an issue affecting many members in the local community. It is an example of the success of the work of the sisters and the NECDS. It clearly demonstrates how they had energised the community, giving it the confidence to stand up for injustice. This chapter will conclude, firstly, by exploring the long-term success of the mission and the ways in which the mission grew beyond the communities in which the sisters worked. Finally, the chapter will look at the closure of the scheme as the sisters sought to step back from creating new community groups and chose to focus their energies on supporting groups already working in the community.

The North East Energy Group is Formed

In the winter of 1979 electricity prices rose steeply and unexpectedly. Parishioners at Burwood began talking to each other about the increase and the effect it was having on their families and their standard of living. They conducted a survey of 130 families, which showed that most families had been hit hard by the sudden increases, with many

³⁵⁶ Father Kevin Burns, interview by author, Christchurch, November 20, 2019.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.



Figure 6: Michael McNabb protests the rise in Electricity prices. (Source: "North East Christchurch Energy Group Protest." *Christchurch Star*, 1979. Accessed August 6, 2019. <https://discoverywall.nz/media/1552>).

struggling to cope. On August 26, 1979, they held a public meeting where a large number of people turned up. As a result of this meeting, the North East Energy Group was formed with over 60 families committing themselves to the new group. Residents left the meeting with the task of researching the policies governing electricity supply and its pricing. They quickly discovered that despite a profit of several million dollars the New Zealand Electricity Department had increased its bulk charges by sixty per cent, which affected local householders through a forty-eight per cent price increase for Christchurch residents.



Figure 7: Sr Monica and Sr Helen cooking stew on their open fire in Hampshire Street after having their power cut off, August 1980. (Source: “Christchurch Star.” Accessed April 27, 2019. <https://discoverywall.nz/album/1894/72191>).

On 1 October 1979, a second public meeting was called and residents decided they needed to take action. So, a few days later they formed a line outside the M.E.D. in Manchester Street. Each person went in, and paid only seventy-five per cent of their electricity bill, and handed over a letter explaining their reasons why (see Figure 6). Sister Marie recalls the day:

I remember the media was there the television cameras were there and we did that and we knew that the outcome would be that we would have our power cut off and of course that's eventually what happened.³⁵⁸

Initially, the group decided to have their power cut off for a month in protest with the understanding that families could decide to leave earlier if they chose. By August 1980, twenty-three families were living without electricity. These families along with the Aranui Sisters had been living without power, unable to even cook a hot meal (see Figure 7 and

³⁵⁸ Sister Marie McCrea, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

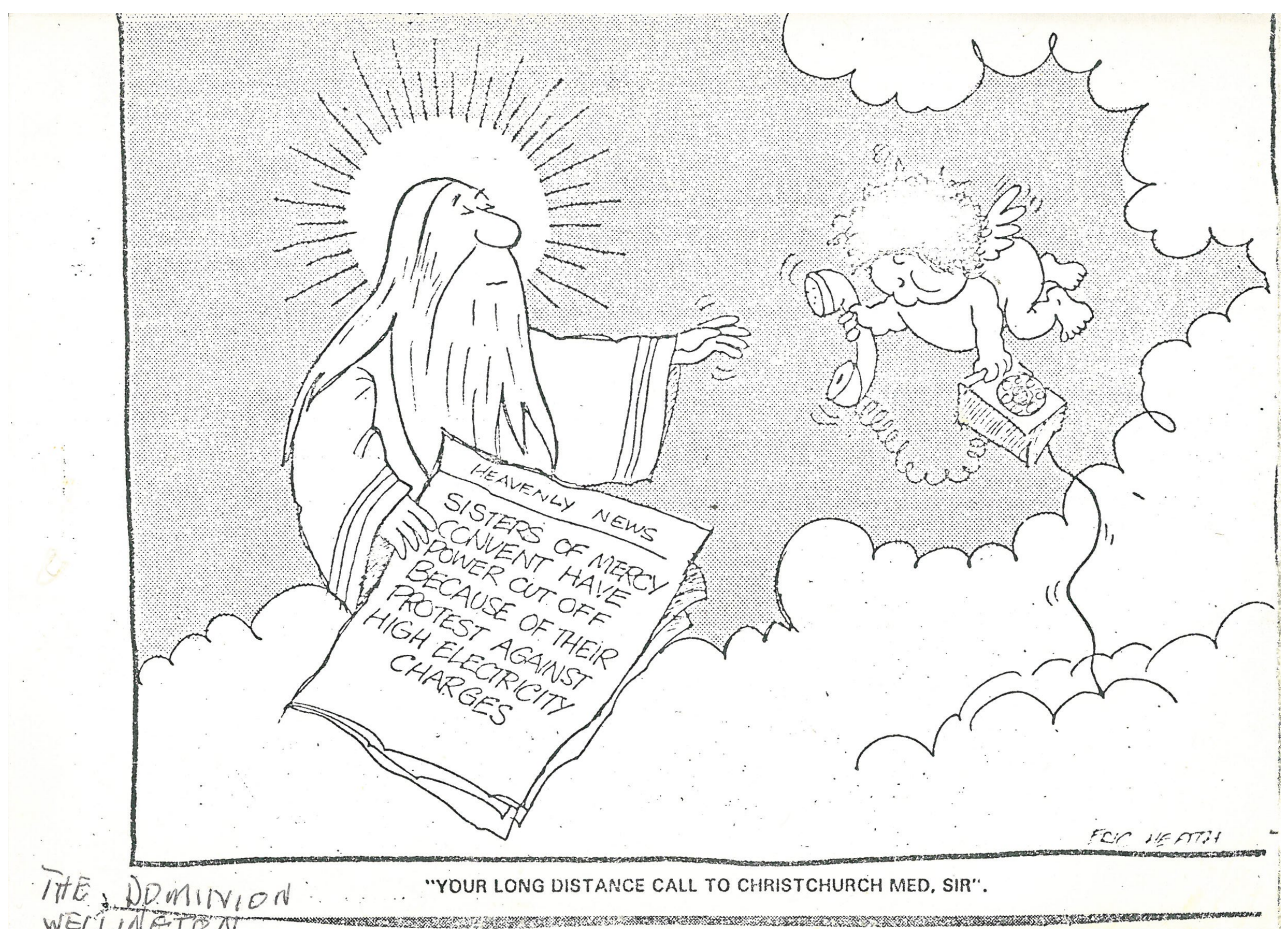


Figure 8: Cartoon depicting the Sisters involvement in the North East Energy Group pretest. (Source: Sisters of Mercy Archives, *Cartoon, The Dominion Wellington, “Your Long Distance Call to Christchurch MED Sir”*).

8). Sister Marie described this challenging time with great fondness as it brought together the community in a new and exciting way:

It was very interesting what happened it was a time of experiencing a different kind of hospitality that people would bring us in cooking and baking and I can remember going to different neighbours places because they would invite you over to have a shower or to do the washing. It was a very good way for neighbours to connect with one another ... we had celebrations and we came together and supported one another and I think Father Kevin worked out how to heat a casserole up on the fire and then make one of those ovens out of hay, or something, where it just cooks all day. We became very creative.³⁵⁹

Through working together to help each other live without electricity the consequences of living without electricity the residents of Burwood formed a sense of community spirit and joined together through their joint protest action.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.



Figure 9: Energy Minister Bill Birch meets with Protestors. (Source: “Minister Meets with Energy Protestors.” *Christchurch Star*, April 24, 1980. Accessed August 5, 2019. <https://discoverywall.nz/media/72251>).

As part of their protest, the Energy Group invited the Minister of Energy Bill Birch to come and stay with one of the families. They hoped that they could show him what it was like for families who could not afford to pay their power bills to have their power cut off. Although Birch did not agree to stay with one of the families, he did agree to come down and talk with the Energy Group (see Figure 9). Marie recalls how the group prepared for the meeting by putting the chairs in a circle, as “they didn’t want him talking at them they wanted him to talk with them.”³⁶⁰ Birch stayed and talked with them for a few hours as the Energy Group tried to convey that their protest was about families “subsidising the corporate industries in the city” and that they were paying the price for corporate businesses.³⁶¹ In the words of Father Kevin, the protest was about making a statement he recalls, “we wanted to make a public statement that electricity is out of reach of the normal family.”³⁶² Beverly supports Father Kevin’s recollection that it was about people

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Father Kevin Burns, interview by author, Christchurch, November 20, 2019.

and making authorities realise the effect these costs were having on people: "It was about, I guess, solidarity of people coming together and saying this isn't good enough."³⁶³

The protest sought to show was about people and forcing the Christchurch M.E.D. to realise the human consequences of cutting people's power off for missed payments. When the protest ended, one by one each protesting family went into the M.E.D. to pay their power bill. Each family asked to see an official and recounted in detail what it was like to live without electricity. Day after day M.E.D. officers were faced with the stories of family struggles. Sister Pauline accompanied one mother and watched as she recorded the difficulties she had endured while living without power.³⁶⁴ In her book *A Changing Order*, Pauline wrote that,

"One thing seemed certain to me. For a long time to come, no official at the M.E.D. would be able to make the decision to disconnect electricity from a home without thinking of the punishment they were inflicting, and its effects on women in particular."³⁶⁵

Father Kevin also reflected on the closure of the Group saying,

Like all things in our community, we sort of reached a stage where we knew it was all over. We didn't set out to say the government is going to get to and change the pricing. I mean that was sort of part of the agenda, but we were realistic and it was our intention to actually explode the issue, go as far as we could and then one day to sit down and say it's all over.

The group reflected on what they had achieved having successfully highlighted the issue through the large amount of attention they received from the press including several articles in the *Christchurch Star* from October 1979 and throughout 1980.³⁶⁶ According to Father Kevin, the Group ended organically and in a very reflective way. They held a "liturgy and we closed it. We didn't make a big fuss of it at all, but we were all there by

³⁶³ Beverly McNabb, interview by author, Christchurch, January 10, 2020.

³⁶⁴ O'Regan, *A Changing Order*, 131.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ See: "Family Without Power Fighting for a Principal: Electricity Man in Quite Protest," *Christchurch Star*, February 13, 1980; "Minister Meets Power Rebels," *Christchurch Star*, April 24, 1980; "Nuns Get into the Habit of No Power," *Christchurch Star*, August 6, 1980; "Rueben Gives All to Power Protest," *Christchurch Star*, October 31, 1979.

this stage the people who were supporting us life had gone on you know and we knew [it was time].” He continued on to say that “some people were bewildered, because what did you achieve? It was hard to answer that, but we had achieved an enormous amount in ourselves and we had made Canterbury a bit more aware.”³⁶⁷

The Energy Group demonstrates the sisters’ philosophy in action through the growing confidence of the community. It brought the community together in a new way as Beverly recalled, “we helped to build each other up like we’d have soup and bun nights and do things to talk about our morale.”³⁶⁸ Her strongest memories of the protest are about people coming together as she says,

My strong memories are about being part of it of going with friends — we had a washing machine in the Church hall so going over there bringing over the washing and talking.³⁶⁹

It was also an opportunity for the sisters to learn more about the struggles faced by some families in the community as Sister Pauline wrote in a letter to the Congregation, “We were for a month without electricity ourselves and we came to a deeper understanding of what it means to be poor.”³⁷⁰ When people’s self-worth is diminished, they become vulnerable as “governments are only held accountable by strong community.”³⁷¹ The North East Energy Group is an example of this as they came together to stand up to the corporate industries and Government to fight an injustice in their community. Individually they were just people struggling to cope with rising electricity prices, but by talking to each other and working together they were able to form a united body capable of standing up for change. It was this kind of confidence that the sisters had hoped to achieve through work within the community.

³⁶⁷ Father Kevin Burns, interview by author, Christchurch, November 20, 2019.

³⁶⁸ Beverly McNabb, interview by author, Christchurch, January 10, 2020.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Sisters of Mercy Archives, “Pauline, 1986”.

³⁷¹ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Overview of North East Community Development Scheme 1979-95 by Tony McChon*, 2018.15.12.

Long Term Success of the Mission

The success of the work carried out by the Aranui Sisters both in Aranui and as part of the NECDS in Parklands and the greater eastern suburbs can be attributed to the common mission shared by the sisters and their strong sense of faith and conviction of the importance of their work. They entered into their mission with a clear goal to engage with the community, building relationships between neighbours and fostering a sense of community.

The sisters were able to meet the goals they set for themselves as the structures they put in place early on in their work allowed them to achieve their aims as they believed “that the practice of having a leader and having a certain structure are the main reasons why so many of our schemes groups have continued in existence for several years.”³⁷² Having clear aims and strong leadership were part of their success in the words of Sister Teresa, “We were older and were experienced in the positions of responsibility; had a strong belief in the call of the spirit in response to Vatican II; had come at a time when we still had strong community structures.”³⁷³ The sisters arrived in the community ready to listen and to meet people on their own terms, this meant that they did not impose any unwanted structures upon vulnerable people instead focusing on understanding the needs of the people they were trying to help. In her 1986 letter to the Congregation Pauline wrote they “see ourselves as having a responsibility to challenge the causes of injustice,” because of this the sisters were concerned with promoting peace and justice which meant dealing with issues of sexism, racism, institutionalism and any other oppressive structures.³⁷⁴ Pauline described the Aranui Sisters as a group of sisters “searching for a feminist spirituality that can nourish and inspire us.”³⁷⁵ The sisters were able to acknowledge the success of their mission work as they achieved their goal of building a sense of community through facilitating relationships and their work establishing community groups for people to come together. The people they worked alongside gained a self-awareness, which enabled them to help each other and engage

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

³⁷⁴ Sisters of Mercy Archives, “Pauline, 1986.”

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

with issues of injustice, such as the increasing price of electricity, forming a sense of community that had been lacking in the suburbs.

The success of the mission work meant that the sisters were able to take their work beyond the eastern suburbs to other parts of New Zealand. They were invited to give talks and participate in conferences around the country. Pauline and Teresa notably participated in the “100 Years On - Wahine Hui” held in Gore in 1993 as part of the centenary celebrations of women’s suffrage in New Zealand. They held a workshop entitled “Community and Change” using their experience in Aranui and Parklands to instruct rural women on how to cope with changes in all aspects of their lives including the economic, social, physical and emotional dimensions.³⁷⁶ While in Gore, they were also invited to speak to the local Catholic Parish where they talked about what community means to them as their chosen way of life as Sisters of Mercy and how they see their method of building community spirit as only one way of approaching the subject. They also told their audience about how many people do not know their own talents and that part of their work was in helping people to find their own gifts that they could use to improve the community. They closed their presentation by stating the purpose of their work: “it’s an outreach, a mission to the wider community provided originally by parishioners but now by many non-parishioners as well.”³⁷⁷

The work the sisters carried out received widespread attention through newspaper coverage, including an article on “The Path to Equality” written by Pauline for *The Press* in which she discussed the importance of social justice in establishing equality.³⁷⁸ The sisters’ attendance at various gatherings, seminars and lectures and Pauline’s participation in radio interviews also helped their mission to gain broad recognition. The sisters often found themselves to be the only religious present in many of the events they attended. In their 1975 Evaluation of their community the sisters wrote about a Church service they attended to mark the opening of International Women’s Year, “The Christchurch Cathedral was packed with women; the Processional was made up of two representatives from forty-eight Women’s Groups throughout the city. It was sadly significant that on the programme there were no nuns listed and that we were the only

³⁷⁶ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder - Talks Prepared for Various Groups*, 2018.15.24.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Pauline O'Regan, “The Path to Equality,” *The Press*, January 5, 2000.

nuns present in that vast congregation.”³⁷⁹ The sisters also received widespread recognition for their work in the community. In 1979, Pauline was granted a Winston Churchill Fellowship to investigate local community development, and the resources provided at the community level for people normally placed in institutions.³⁸⁰ She travelled throughout England, Scotland, France, Switzerland and the United States of America, visiting urban areas where different forms of community work were taking place, community-based care centres for “disturbed” youth and religious communities were emerging that engaged in areas of community development.³⁸¹ Sister Teresa went on a similar educational trip in 1991 travelling throughout the United States where she visited different community initiatives to see how they engaged in community development.³⁸² In 1990 Sister Pauline was honoured with a CBE and in 2001 she made the Queen’s Birthday honours list again with the title Distinguished Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit. The award which was granted for her services to education and community was accepted with the blessings of the community. As Pauline said in an interview, the award was for everyone in her community: “It is a nod in the direction of people who care about justice issues.”³⁸³

When asked to reflect on the success of their work, Marie recalled that their background as teachers had provided them with key skills that led to the success of their mission work,

We were all teachers we had a good understanding of the importance of process and planning so whatever we did we planned carefully and we set ourselves up to succeed rather than fail. We would often run a pilot, like in the work that I did we would run a pilot course and then we would evaluate and anything we did we would evaluate it and look at what we needed to change.³⁸⁴

³⁷⁹ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Evaluation of North East Community Development Scheme (Sisters of Mercy) Experimental Community*, 2018.15.19.

³⁸⁰ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Report for Winston Churchill Trust Board by Sr Pauline O’Regan on Investigation into local Community Development*, 2018.15.17.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Evaluation of North East Community Development Scheme (Sisters of Mercy) Experimental Community*, 2018.15.19.

³⁸³ Mike Crean, “Sister of Mercy says award for community,” *The Press*, June 4, 2001; “Queen’s Birthday Honours Recipients,” *Christchurch Star*, June 6, 2001.

³⁸⁴ Sister Marie McCrea, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

The care that was taken in planning each step is evident in Pauline and Teresa's work *Community Give A Go!* and their follow up book *I Can Do Anything, But not on my Own*. Sister Helen recalled that what she felt most proud of was "the breaking down of that barrier of isolation that they [the community] lived with and never questioned really."³⁸⁵ For Marie it was in the way they were able to empower people,

I think the way in which we have been able to empower people to recognise their gifts and equip them with the skills to become more active within their communities, to care for one another, to make friendships and work together for the common good and build a healthy local community I think would be what I feel most proud of.³⁸⁶

The Scheme Comes to a Close

In 2005, the sisters decided that it was time to draw their Scheme to a close. They hoped that by discontinuing the scheme they would free themselves to work amongst pre-existing community groups rather than continuing to create new ones. In the first step towards winding down the scheme, in December 2003 the core community of Sisters Pauline, Teresa, Helen and Marie sold their home in Palmers Road, which had been the base of the scheme for many years and moved to Butterfield Avenue in Linwood in 2003. Sister Marie continued to work as a counsellor and psychotherapist from the Salvation Army premises in Linwood. Meanwhile, Sharon Parker and Coleen Bundo continued as workers within the scheme, and the Pegasus Coffee Group and the Awareness Group continued to meet regularly.³⁸⁷ These groups had proved particularly successful, with the Coffee Group having developed over the course of fifteen years into a tight-knit group of friends. The Awareness Group had grown in number to twelve and was self-directing in the way that members suggested speakers and outings.³⁸⁸ Through their time working with the scheme, the sisters had reached their goal of developing the community and provided the local people with the skills needed to bring their community together.

³⁸⁵ Sister Helen Goggin, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

³⁸⁶ Sister Marie McCrea, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

³⁸⁷ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Folder from final AGM 25 February 2005*, 2018.15.6.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.



Figure 10: The sisters with community members Allen and Denise Ashton at their 25 Year Celebration. (Source: *Christchurch Diocese Archives*, 2018.15.11).

On Friday 25 February 2005, they gathered with invited friends and workers of the scheme for their final A.G.M. They reflected on their time as part of the NECDS looking back at their small beginnings in Aranui to the large and successful community development programme that emerged from their work in Parklands. The group shared memories of their time together before presenting certificates to senior community worker Sharron Parker and co-worker Colleen Bundo, acknowledging their involvement with the scheme.³⁸⁹ Sharron had worked as a counsellor, as leader of the Pegasus Coffee Group and was involved in providing Assertiveness Training courses for the Salvation Army Coffee group, while Colleen had worked alongside Sister Helen co-leading the Awareness Group.³⁹⁰ The meeting was drawn to a close with a liturgy led by Father Kevin.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

Members of their community wrote to the sisters thanking them for their years of work in the community ahead of their final meeting. In a letter written to the Sisters on the eve of the closure of the scheme Beverly, who had worked alongside the sisters for many years wrote, "For myself, I recognise the learning, support and growth that has developed from my long and fruitful association with the scheme."³⁹¹ The support of the scheme had helped many women such as Beverly to develop their skills and grow as individuals, becoming valued members of the community. The effect the sisters had on the people they worked alongside demonstrates the success of their scheme. This is evident in the many letters written to congratulate the sisters upon celebrating their 25th anniversary of their work in the community in February 1998 (see Figure 10). One woman, Colleen Larsen, wrote, "You certainly equipped me extremely well to return to the workforce."³⁹² Others wrote, "I'll be thinking of you all this weekend. It's wonderful what you've done in the last 25 years ..."³⁹³ Another said, "every memory I have of our working together, both in the school and in the community, is positive ... Of all the people I know, or know of, in religious orders, you most successfully made contact with those in the community whose needs were greatest, and so I know of no other group of people who have such a good reason to celebrate the success of their endeavours."³⁹⁴

The sisters shared a vision to reach out into the community and break down the perceived loneliness and isolation, but also to provide people with the confidence and the ability to make a difference in their own communities. The Energy Group was an example of the sisters' philosophy in action as people came together and had the confidence in themselves to fight what they saw as an injustice in the community. The sisters went into their mission with a simple goal to break down the barrier of isolation. Through their involvement in a number of community groups and the relationships they formed with their neighbours, the sisters managed to achieve their aim. Together with Father Kevin and the rest of the North East Community Development Scheme, they were able to provide much-needed support within the community and reached a stage where they felt

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, *Correspondence - Miscellaneous, Including Funding*, 2018.15.11.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

comfortable they were leaving the community in a better condition than when they arrived.

Conclusion

“I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.”

- John 10:10

This thesis argues that the work undertaken by the Aranui Sisters in 1973 until the closure of the North East Community Development Scheme in 2005 was an example of successful community engagement that sought to break down barriers of isolation and loneliness to empower vulnerable members of society. By using interviews with Sister Helen and Sister Marie, alongside written material, the voices of the sisters, their thoughts, motivations and intentions have remained central to this work. Interviews with Father Kevin and Beverly McNabb have also provided a different perspective on their work, highlighting the role of the Parish through developing community groups and the importance of building relationships for people in the community. The mission of the Aranui Sisters of Mercy is an important part of local history worth celebrating for its success. Their story merges elements of feminist history with local history, the history of the Catholic Church and that of religious women within New Zealand. The work these women undertook in the community broke down barriers within not only the communities they worked but also from within the Catholic Church by answering the call of Vatican II and bringing Gospel values and the work of Catherine McAuley to late-twentieth-century New Zealand.

The Aranui Sisters upheld a strong sense of value throughout their mission work choosing to live by words such as those above from the Gospel of John, as well as, living out the values of Catherine McAuley of caring for the poor and vulnerable at the level of the street. There was a strong sense of community that underpinned all of the work the sisters undertook in the eastern suburbs. They placed a strong importance on building up relationships and understanding people on a personal level, they tried to ensure that they came into the community with no preconceived judgment but simply accepted people as they were. One of the important factors in generating this sense of community was the sisters' willingness to work with all kinds of people. They did not restrict themselves to only working with Catholics in the Aranui and Parklands areas but intended to help anyone who expressed a need.

This thesis began by placing the work of the Aranui Sisters of Mercy within the broader historical context of the Order of the Sisters of Mercy, from its origins in Dublin under Catherine McAuley, through to the Order's expansion globally and into New Zealand. By placing their work within this context, we are able to see how their work can be viewed as a return to the work of Catherine McAuley in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. This opening chapter demonstrates the importance of Vatican II as a motivator for the Aranui Sisters' work in the eastern suburbs of Christchurch. Without the reform and renewal of the Second Vatican Council opening up the Church to fit within modern-day society, the sisters would not have been able to make the change from convent to community. The motivations and aims of the Aranui Sisters can be seen in the way they responded to the call of Vatican II and sought to help the vulnerable people living in the suburbs, to help young mothers and to simply be there and listen. The strong influence of Catherine McAuley was also evident in the way the sisters conducted their work as they hoped to make a difference at the level of the street, something they were not able to achieve from inside the convent.

Chapter Two highlighted the work the sisters carried out in the suburb of Aranui. It outlines the transition the sisters made from the Villa Maria convent to the statehouse in Porchester Street, the level of preparation they put into the move and the challenges they faced from the Catholic community. The sisters spent time building up relationships with their neighbours using their clothesline as a point of contact from which they were able to build up trust. The sisters worked to build up a network of support within the community with particular attention given to vulnerable women including solo mothers. Evaluation was important throughout the sisters' mission in the east but was particularly significant after the first three years in Aranui. As seen in Chapter Three, where their evaluation demonstrated the success of their mission and allowed the sisters to continue working in the East expanding their work into Parklands and Burwood.

In Chapter Four, this thesis focused on the work of the Aranui Sisters in Burwood and Parklands as part of the North East Community Development Scheme. This chapter highlighted how through establishing a range of community groups the sisters were able to bring neighbours together helping to eliminate the perceived loneliness and isolation felt particularly by women living in the suburbs. The work of the sisters also expanded at this time to involve members of the community in running their groups and courses in what they described as "community development." This allowed members of the

community to develop leadership skills as well as other practical skills that enabled them to enter into the paid workforce.

The final chapter of this thesis highlighted the impact that the North East Development Scheme and the sisters' work had on the confidence of the community through the North East Energy Group protest, which saw a large group from the community protest against rising electricity prices gaining media and government attention. Chapter Five concluded by examining the closure of the North East Development Scheme, which the sisters drew to a close in 2005 after over thirty years of community work. The sisters drew the scheme to a close choosing to focus on groups already working within the community rather than creating new ones.

The issues that affected many women at the time of their mission made their work all the more important for the communities in which they worked. These were suburban neurosis, stemming from loneliness and isolation, which was at the heart of the sisters' mission, particularly in Parklands, which had limited facilities leaving many women feeling trapped. Some of these women also struggled with life as housewives wanting to find something other than housework to fill their daily routine. The sisters were able to support these women by providing them with opportunities to come together and form friendships. The sisters' work was also affected by many of the women's issues dominating the feminist movement in the 1970s as they saw many of the problems women faced such as a lack of childcare, the reduction of benefits for solo mothers, and mental health issues and worked to help women to empower themselves through education and support networks.

The mission of the Aranui Sisters of Mercy saw them work to develop relationships between neighbours and engage people within the community. The sisters were able to achieve the goals they set for themselves when they first arrived in the eastern suburbs, to empower people with the skills need to make a difference in their community. This is best described in the words of Sister Marie:

I think the way in which we have been able to empower people to recognise their gifts and equip them with the skills to become more active within their communities, to care for one another, to make friendships and

work together for the common good and build a healthy local community.
I think would be what I feel most proud of.³⁹⁵

³⁹⁵ Sister Marie McCrea, interview by author, Christchurch, July 5, 2019.

Appendix 1

Table 1.1 Total Population, 1971 to 1986

	Aranui	Burwood
1971	5,412	7,637
1976	5,389	7,633
1981	5,040	5,899
1986	5,009	5,788

Source: Census of Population and Dwellings 1976, Table 1 p. 4; Census of Population and Dwellings 1986, Series A Report 2, Table 5 p. 37.

Table 1.2 Male and Female Highest Post Primary Qualification, Aranui and Burwood

	Aranui		Burwood	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Secondary School	1,255	1,016	1,952	1,485
Teachers Training College	20	4	92	17
Technical Institute	54	202	181	557
University	16	24	37	151
Teachers Training College and University	9	5	45	46
University and Technical Institute	1	10	12	42
Other Tertiary	38	35	167	77

Source: Census of Population and Dwellings 1976, Canterbury Regional Bulletin, Table 10 p. 32-33.

Table 1.3 Male and Female Marital Status Aged Over 16 Years, 1976 ³⁹⁶

	Aranui		Burwood	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Never Married	295	411	551	677
Married	1,059	1,030	1,895	1,863
Legally Separated	112	27	47	37
Widowed	106	27	243	52
Divorced	75	37	33	24
Total (Including not specified)	1,647	1,533	2,769	2,653

Source: *Census of Population and Dwellings 1976, Canterbury Regional Bulletin, Table 5 p. 8-9.*

Table 1.4 Male and Female Marital Status Aged Over 15 Years, 1986 ³⁹⁷

	Aranui		Burwood	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Never Married	519	582	522	591
Married	732	714	1,329	1,305
Remarried	111	123	117	120
Legally Separated	144	78	66	45
Widowed	135	33	279	69
Divorced	147	78	90	57
Total (Including not Specified)	1,827	1,644	2,418	2,202

Source: *Census of Population and Dwellings 1986, Series B Report 19, Table 5 p. 36.*

³⁹⁶ Table 1.3 and 1.4 do not include de-facto relationships.

³⁹⁷ Totals for tables 1.3 - 1.4 include combinations of marriage statuses and not specified cases that are not included in the preceding columns.

Table 1.5 Male and Female Social Security Benefits, 1976

	Aranui		Burwood	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
None	595	1,334	1,249	2,316
Family Benefit	711	18	1,049	12
Age Benefit	109	75	281	158
Universal Super-Annuation	11	14	87	84
War Pension or Allowance	12	27	28	65
Widow's Benefit	26	-	34	-
Domestic Purposes Benefit	19	1	6	-
Invalids Benefit	11	19	5	6
Sickness Benefit	24	58	19	52
Unemployment Benefit	9	24	5	18
Widows and Family Benefit	12	-	16	-
Domestic Purposes and Family Benefit	114	2	35	-
Age Benefit and Additional Benefit or Supplementary Assistance	19	14	19	9
Total	1,738	1,612	2,872	2,747

Source: Census of Population and Dwellings 1976, Incomes and Social Security Benefits, Table 11, p. 110.

Table 1.6 Male and Female Social Welfare Payments, 1986 ³⁹⁸

	Aranui		Burwood	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Family Benefit	210	12	336	36
National Super-Annuation	261	198	591	441
Domestic Purposes Benefit	66	9	18	3
Unemployment Benefit	81	159	31	69
Sickness or Invalid's Benefit	39	66	21	54
Widows Benefit	21	-	45	-
Other	21	9	15	18
Total Receiving One Payment	705	450	1,065	618
Two Payments	477	60	357	72
Three or More Payments	39	9	15	3
No Payments Received	552	1,008	933	1,422
Not Specified	51	120	45	84
Total	1,827	1,644	2,418	2,202

Source: Census of Population and Dwellings 1986, Series B Report 19, Table 12 p. 70.

This data demonstrates the trends the Sisters saw in the community of increasing rates of divorce and large numbers of single mothers struggling on the DPB. Table 1.2 shows the low rates of tertiary education many women received, particularly in Aranui. Burwood, in contrast, had one of the highest numbers of women training in technical institutes in Christchurch City but remained low in terms of University qualifications. The Marital Status data (Tables 1.3 and 1.4) shows how the number of married men and women has decreased while the number of divorced, separated and remarried men and women has increased over the ten year period between 1976 and 1986. This is also reflected in Tables 1.5 and 1.6 as numbers of women receiving the DPB increased between 1976 and 1986 in both Aranui and Burwood. Aranui had the highest number of women out of all the

³⁹⁸ Totals for tables 1.5 - 1.6 include combinations of Benefits and not specified cases that are not included in the preceding columns.

suburbs in Christchurch City on the DPB in 1986, ten years earlier in 1976 Aranui was also the suburb with the highest number of women on both the DPB and the Family Benefit at 114. In 1986, the number of women receiving two payments was also relatively high when compared with other Christchurch suburbs. Burwood, however, remains average in comparison. When comparing these increases in beneficiaries it is important to consider that the data does not show all cases of DPB payments, as shown in Table 1.6, for those people receiving two or more benefits the data does not separate these to show the exact total. Therefore, the total number of people receiving the DPB and Family Benefit is likely to be much higher. In comparing these two suburbs, it is important to consider the total population of each suburb as Burwood had a higher population by approximately two thousand for the years 1971 and 1976. A comparison is unable to be made with Parklands as it was not established until 1976 and does not appear as a stand-alone suburb in the Census, instead it is considered part of Burwood.

Appendix 2

Table 2: The Residents of Mattingley Street According to the “Evaluation of the Sisters of Mercy Experimental Community Aranui 1975”

No. Mattingley Street	Name	Family Type	Children	Situation of household
1	“Mary”	Solo Mother.	Three children under 10.	Husband making it difficult for her to retrieve any belongs from previous home. Receives support form friends and family.
2	“Smith’s”	Three generations in one house.	Unknown.	Feeling of isolation.
3	“Jean and Ron”	Nuclear Family.	Three children under 10.	Married young Jean only 24.
4	“Helen”	Solo Mother.	Four sons, one married, the rest teenagers.	Bitterness about husband who left her with a substantial debt to repay.
5	“Dave and Dorris”	Nuclear Family.	Five children of their own plus three boarders.	Family living in three bedroom house and boarders considered “no hopers” whom nobody wants.
6	“Margaret”	Solo Mother.	Five children and her oldest daughter is at home with baby.	Never accepted money from the government choosing to work instead and has been struggling to live off \$20 a week.
7	“Doreen and Ted”	Nuclear Family.	Two daughter, son was killed in a motorbike accident at end of the street.	Parents are alcoholics and unhappy living on the street since son’s accident.
8	“Rose”	Solo Mother.	Four children between 15 and 9.	Struggling to cope with herself and family works two jobs to support home.
9	“Phyllis”	Widowed.	Married sons, daughters and their children moving in and out of home.	
10	“Lorraine and Chris”	Separated.	Four children between 12 and 7.	Husband a heavy drinker and comes to the house everyday getting in Lorraine’s way. Lorraine spends her money unwisely.
11	“Bill and Margaret”	Retired Couple.	Two unmarried sons at home.	Supporting their daughter a solo mother with five children by caring for children while she is at work.

12	"Kath and Ben"	Nuclear Family.	Five children.	Unhappily married. Ben is violent and Kath seeks the company of another man.
13	"Shirley and Mick"	Nuclear Family.	Four children.	Mick is violent and is very stingy with money. Shirley works a night job.
14	"The Jones"	Middle-aged couple.	Four daughters all married.	
15	"Paula"	Solo Mother.	Three children aged 11, 9 and 7.	Husband returned to England and now has a "de facto" husband. Appears to be coping well.
16	"The Lindays"	Nuclear Family.	At least one son.	No one seems to know the family. Mrs Linday is very nervous and hardly leaves her home. One son is in Pauline's class at Aranui High and is very disturbed.
17	"Pat and Peggy"	Nuclear Family.	Three children at home.	Pat drinks very heavily, Peggy works during the day. They do not mix with anyone else on the street.
18	"Monica and Paul"	Nuclear Family.	Two children one has just left home and have taken in a Malaysian student.	Paul is a recovering alcoholic and Monica attends AA meetings.
19	"Pepi and Tony"	Nuclear Family.	Five children.	Tony has caused problems for the family through his drinking.
20	"The Kennedy's"	Unknown.	Four adults and a young girl in her twenties.	Unsure on their relationship but John is seriously handicapped.
21	"Vi"	Solo Mother.	Three children.	Separated form alcoholic husband has worked two jobs to try and furnish her home.
22	"Ethel and Rob"	Nuclear Family.	Two children.	Rob invested unwisely in farm lost everything and moved family to Christchurch. Ethel works full time.
23	"Maureen"	Solo Mother.	Three sons and one daughter.	Left her alcoholic husband behind in Kenya. Has always worked to support herself and after 11 years in NZ applied for a benefit.
24	"Edna and Pat"	Nuclear Family.	Four children.	All member sou family handicapped. Edna and Graham try to be good parents but require constant support and affirmation. A lack of this prior to the sisters arrival resulted in child-beating.
25	"June"	Solo Mother.	Four young daughters.	Husband only been gone two weeks. June is very distressed and unhappy.

Source: Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, Evaluation of the Sisters of Mercy Experimental Community Aranui 1975.

Appendix 3

Table 3.1: List of North East Parish Community Groups Operating in the Community in 1984

Name	Purpose	Category
Ashwood Link Group	Developed out of a need for further education in various areas of community work. Group meets to discuss material set by the group leader.	One.
Baptism Ministry Team	Members of the parish are called to share the Baptism ministry with Father Kevin.	One.
Base Christian Community Groups	Set up as a small number of couples expressed a desire to meet with others within the parish on a regular basis.	One.
Bifocal Team	Team is responsible for publishing the quarterly parish magazine.	One.
Book Club	Initiated by the Dorcasian Group as a way for people to meet and share an interest in reading.	Two.
Chess Ladder	Chess players and those who wish to learn are able to contact each other in the same manner as the Squash Ladder.	Three.
Christin Initiation Team	Formed in 1983 to study church documents on the new Rites of Christian Initiation. Group established to implement the rites in parish and foster an awareness within the community.	One.
Co-ordinating Team	In place of a Parish Council the Co-ordinating Team takes responsibility for pastoral care of parish groups as well as initiating new directions for pastoral growth.	One.
Coffee Group Leaders	Regular meetings of Coffee Group Leaders who use the time to offer one another support and encouragement and share experiences.	Two.
Coffee Groups	These groups were initiated in the wider community by the parish	Two.
Collective of Men	Began when a number of men expressed an interest in meeting and talking with others about the changing role of men in society.	Three.
Community Group	Aims to build up the Parish as a community of Christian people.	One.

Family Living Programme	Involves parents in the Christian education of their children. Programme is adapted for use in the Parish by group of teachers who meet regularly to develop their skills.	One.
Gardening Group	Group of people looking at alternative and more self sufficient ways of living within the city. Members meet to discuss new ideas and share skills.	Three.
Health Self-care Group	Several members of the parish lead a series of evenings on health and self-care.	Two.
House Mass Group	Monthly daytime Masses held in the homes of local women providing a place for women to pray together in an informal atmosphere.	One.
Liaison Group	Established in 1979 by members of the Core Community calling together people involved in health, education and social services Parklands. Meets regularly to provide effective communication between the different groups and services.	Two.
Library	Established in response to the wish of parishioners to share their books with others.	Three.
Lukan Group	A two year course of study for those seeking a more structured programme of adult Christian education.	One.
Macks Co-op	Co-operative of sharing the care and produce of chickens as a response to their search for alternatives in suburban living.	Three.
Mara Ahu Whenua	One family bought an empty section next to their own and invited others to garden it co-operatively for their families needs.	Three.
Marriage Team	Aims to work at strengthening marriages first by leading discussion programmes on the topic and secondly by developing a preparation programme for young couples.	One.
Married Couples Group	Established by the marriage team for a number of young married couples wishing to work alongside one another in supporting and nurturing their marriages.	One.
Parents Group	A series of discussion evenings for parents who wished to develop their parenting skills further.	Three.

Parklands Game Night	Established by families who wanted to meet from time to time in an informal way for relaxation and company in the form of playing card games together.	Three.
Playgroup	Established by parish members in response to the isolation of mothers of pre-schoolers.	Two.
Serendipity Group	Established to meet the need of the parish to celebrate various events. Meeting are called when necessary.	One.
Squash Ladder	Those within the parish who enjoy squash have formed a means of enjoying the game together, using the parish noticeboard as a means of communication.	Three.
Umbrella Group	Meeting of leaders of various groups to provide mutual support and encouragement.	One.
Wednesday Social Group	Established in response to the isolation of many older people in the area. A regular social meeting of games and friendship.	Two.
Youth Group	Specifically for young people at secondary school and beyond, discussion material is set by the Family Living Programme.	One.

Source: Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, 2018.15.31.

Category One: Those initiated within the parish by and for parish members, for their spiritual and pastoral wellbeing and growth; under the care and responsibility of the co-ordinating team.

Category Two: Those initiated by members of the parish and/or wider community, formed in response to our awareness of the church's mission in the suburbs in which we live; under the care of the parish Umbrella Group.

Category Three: Those initiated by members of the parish to enrich community life by linking us in recreational, cultural or co-operative activities.

Table 3.2: List of Disbanded North East Parish Community Groups (1977-1984)

Name	Purpose	Reason for Disbanding	Category
Burwood Scheme Group 1979-1980	Emerged from the Kingslea Group (est. 1977) to support families involved with the Kingslea Girls' Home.	Scheme finished in 1980 after over twenty families had been involved.	One.
Burwood Women's Group 1977-1978	Formed out of the 1977 United Women's Convention by local parish women who wished to share their experience with other local women at the street level. Over 100 women were involved in open meetings, workshops and home meetings.	Un-specified.	Three.
Community Work Group 1979	Group grew out of 1979 Christian Action Week workshops to research and take action over unemployment in the local area. Group completed a survey and presented the report to parish council.	Wound up later in 1979 after work was completed.	One.
Concorde Place Group 1977-unknown.	Set up to help meet the needs of the elderly living in Concorde Place.	Group continued on in form of Dorcasian Group.	One.
Environment Group 1981-unknown	Established after parish weekend away at Living Springs to implement the development of the church and hall buildings and the ground at the parish centre. In 1983 they realised they needed to study liturgy and the settings appropriate to it to undertake their work more effectively.	Un-specified.	One.
Help and Be Helped Group 1980-unknown	Formed as a response to needs of those living in the area. A list was formed of people willing to be help others in emergency situations.	Group closed as calls became less frequent.	Two.
Liturgy Group 1978-1981	Established by Pastoral Council to lead liturgies and encourage people to be involved.	Disbanded after three years believing they had met their aims.	One.
Liturgy Study Group 1981-1983	Formed to heighten appreciation of the liturgy and help develop public and private prayer.	Came to a close in 1983 as the number of members had dwindled.	One.
Living Here Group 1980-1983	Group was responsible for the publication of the parish monthly magazine.	Group took a break to allow an evaluation of the most effective means of communication within the parish.	One.
Maintenance Group 1980-1981	Established to overview maintenance and development of church and hall buildings, house and grounds.	Group merged with the Environment Group.	One.

North-East Christchurch Parish Pastoral Council 1977-1982	Established broad aims to promote community in the area, involvement in liturgy and action in social justice.	Disbanded in 1982 to make way for something new.	One.
North-East Energy Group 1979-1980	Grew from 1979 Christian Action Week workshop. Formed to raise awareness and to take action over rising electricity prices.	Ground wound up in 1980 after reviewing their achievements.	One.
Origins of the New Zealand Family Group 1980	Formed to raise awareness of the history of the Maori people in Aotearoa. Fostered learning through visits, invited speakers and liturgy.	Un-specified.	One.
Parish Council 1983-1984	Group spent a year in study of the Church's document <i>The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults</i> .	Following completion of study and establishment of new Parish Council the group disbanded.	One.
Parish Interim Executive Group 1982-1983	Formed by outgoing Parish Council to adopt care-taker role in parish life, its main goal being to prepare the ground and set direction for a future parish structure.	Un-specified.	One.
Parish Secretariat 1983-1984	Established at the same time as "Parish Council 1983-1984" to take responsibility for everyday running of the parish while the council was occupied in study.	Disbanded after the establishment of new Parish Council.	One.
Parklands Action Group 1980-1981	Grew out of 1980 Christian Action Week workshop. Aimed to establish and confirm the needs of the people of Parklands and to present these to the appropriate authorities. A survey found need for a doctor, shops and secondary school.	Group merged with Social Justice Group before reforming in 1981 to raise local awareness of the effects of the proposed landfill site. The group disbanded after it had presented its submission to authorities.	One.
Parklands Alternative Education Group 1981-1983	Families involved with Xavier College students who came regularly as part of school programme on childcare and spent three hours a week with mothers of young children under the direction of the Umbrella Group.	Un-specified.	Two.
Social Justice Group 1978-1982	Formed to create an awareness of injustice at local level, national and international levels.	Disbanded after agreeing its original aims had been met and other groups were working on local justice issues.	One.
Springbok Tour Action Group 1981	Formed after a parish meeting to raise awareness of the South African situation and to take action over the Springbok tour.	Group came to an end in October of the same year with a refectio and prayer meeting.	One.

Te Reo Maori 1981-1982; 1983-1984	Two groups have operated in the parish. Group A (1981-1982) formed to encourage the study of the Maori language. Group B (1983-1984) formed by a member of the first group who had completed a course at the Polytechnic. A basic understanding of the language was gained by members.	Un-specified.	Three.
Your Place' 1981-1982	Drop in centre established by Umbrella Group to provide an opportunity for people of Parklands to meet informally and share a cup of tea and chat.	Closed in 1982 after the opening of the Parklands Community Centre.	Two.

Source: Catholic Diocese of Christchurch Archives, 2018.15.31.

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